

The Unseen World: An Exploration of Contemporary Japanese Short Fiction in Translation

A Senior Honors Thesis

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Project Proposal

In order to give myself translating experience, exposure to a world of literature previously unknown to me and most other Americans, and most importantly to help others gain access to Japanese literature, I have decided to translate short story works of fiction by various Japanese authors.

I have thus far chosen works by Hoshi Shin'ichi, Tsutsui Yasutaka, Kogawa Yôko, and Kawamoto Saburô. All of the stories I have selected each contain unique translational difficulties, and are each written in different styles so as to give this project as broad a stylistic range as possible.

I will also write an introductory essay about the difficulties of translating Japanese and the things that I have learned through this process while working with my advisor Professor Bill Tyler.

In addition, after each story I will write a short summary of the challenges of each work, and the things that I learned from working on them.

It is also my plan to include the original Japanese work parallel with my translation so that future students of translation might be able to gain guidance from my work.

The Difficulties of Translating Japanese

Before beginning this project I only had experience translating Japanese animation into English. From that experience I learned a few tricks regarding the translation of simple, spoken Japanese into English, but my Japanese reading abilities were not at a point that would allow me to read Japanese freely enough to feel confident trying to translate literature. After a year of studying hard as a foreign exchange student in Japan I found I had gained the requisite talent and love for reading Japanese literature to allow me to begin embarking on a new translation journey.

After being pressured by numerous faculty members at Ohio State University to pursue an honors thesis, I decided to combine my newfound love of Japanese literature and a burgeoning interest in translation into a project that could be considered an honors thesis. In beginning my project, the first thing I had to do was find a piece of Japanese literature that was feasible enough in length to translate yet still give a level of variety to my project. After giving the task considerable thought, I hit on Japanese short stories. The reason was simple: they're short, entertaining, and easier for a reader of my humble abilities to plow through.

Despite what appear to be simplicity on the surface, there are many complicated aspects to translating a Japanese story. First of all, they are written in Japanese. It took me more than three years to learn how to read Japanese. After that, a variety of less overwhelming issues come into play. Sometimes there are words that, quite literally, have no equivalent in English. The only way to translate them is to explain the word in the translation, which means changing the flow of the story that the original author intended. Sometimes there are place names, or events, or cultural references that require a person to be raised in Japan to understand. At times like these, only consultation with a Japanese native, professor of Japanese culture, or the Internet can help. Also, sometimes the structure and length of a Japanese sentence makes it impossible to turn it into a single, coherent English sentence. Needless to say, all of these molehills add up to make one big, seemingly insurmountable mountain.

In undertaking this project I worked with Professor Bill Tyler. I feel that without his tireless effort and patience towards my amateurish translation I would not have gotten as far as I have in developing my abilities. We had some very interesting Friday afternoon translator 'jam sessions'. As two people from the same country, born and raised in the cultural surroundings of two entirely different generations, it was interesting to see how coming together to talk about translation highlighted the differences between us so obviously. Whenever we encountered a difficult word or expression, he would reach back to one of the humongous paper dictionaries on his desk, and I would reach into my backpack to grab my electronic dictionary. This typifies the generation gap. A translation is an ever-changing entity, dependent upon the person who creates it, the era in which it is made, and the personality of the person editing it. The natural writing style of a translator has a very distinct affect on the way they translate. My wording, slang, sentence structure, and creative constructions were often shot down by Professor Tyler. He has his own very distinct vocabulary and ideas about how a story should flow or feel, just as I do. His seemingly boundless Japanese knowledge and translating experience acted as a very useful guide and retaining wall for the flood of incoherent ideas that came from my brain.

There were times when we would disagree about the translation of a particular section, but after consultation, explanation, and compromises from both sides, a consensus was almost always reached. The fruit of our efforts? My translated English phrases like "hotel sardine with an exclusivity contract" turned into "contracted him, and then locked him away in a hotel". It would have been amusing to put my original translation in all of its glory next to the final translation that the professor and I worked on together, but in the end I decided against it for reasons of pride and translational quality. You see, the dictionary isn't always right. There isn't one 'RIGHT' translation for any particular sentence. Sometimes the best translation isn't in the Japanese-English dictionary. Sometimes it's born from the juggling act of maintaining the original author's intent and making the translation as easy to read as possible.

If I chose the hardest part of translating Japanese literature, it would be none of the things I have listed above. By far, the most difficult aspect of translating is the time involved in doing it. First I had to read through a bunch of Japanese short stories to find the ones that I was most interested in. Then I had to sit down and translate every single sentence, essentially re-writing the story. After that, I consulted with Professor Tyler, and then came the part that for some reason I was the most reluctant to do: revision. The

hard copies of my “graded” translations sat on my dorm room floor for weeks without being touched. I simply could not muster the ambition to re-do something that I had already worked on for so long and gotten to a point that I thought was pretty good. This is quite telling of my own personality, and at the same time quite telling of the translator’s pride which I have come to harbor within me. I understand each of the short stories in a certain way, through the lens of my own collection of experiences and understanding, and my English translations reflect very closely what I feel to be the meaning of the original text. However, I also began to realize the limits of creative interpretation in translation.

It is a translator’s job to act not as a lens, but a mirror. He or she must take the author’s original intent, understand the meaning of the author’s words, realize the audience to whom the author was originally writing, and then accurately reflect that writing style into English. Each author and every story has a feel to it. Some stories use typical, colloquial Japanese. Some authors write in a very unique style. Before translating a single word, the mind doing the translating must consider how to adapt all those things into another language so that someone who can’t read Japanese can have as similar a feeling as possible to the Japanese people reading the original. The author’s message, with all its nuances, must be understood completely before it can be reflected accurately.

Everything about translation was a lot more difficult than I originally thought. It is impossible to remove yourself entirely from your work. Translators that do their work well are masterful artists: each with a unique and easily recognizable style, and each wonderfully insane in their own way. If I have gained anything from this project, I hope it is that I have gained *my* “translator’s voice”.

Ahh, Motherland!

By: Shin'ichi Hoshi

"C'mon, wake up. We're at war..."

I heard a voice near my head. It wasn't an auditory hallucination. The phone on my bedside table woke me up a little before noon as I was sleeping sweetly, and a voice flowed from the receiver in my hand. It was one of the suits.

I was working for a commercial television broadcaster. I didn't harbor any lofty ideals or principles, but could be cleverer than most and take care of a majority of things pretty efficiently. From the company's perspective, a good little employee. Around the time of the phone call, I was in charge of a comedy quiz show that was pulling in pretty good ratings. Entertaining people is a good thing. But, why did the suits decide to call me at such an odd hour...? I figured I must have screwed up on the show the other day or something.

In a sleepy voice I asked, "Yeah? What's all this about a war?"

"We held an emergency reorganization meeting for our line-up. We've gotten the approval of the sponsors. We're turning your show into a series of special reports. If the viewers like it, we're going daily on this one. The theme is war."

"What kind of war?"

'As long as it is regarded as evil, war will never lose its charm. When it is looked upon as vulgar, it will cease to be popular.'

Oscar Wilde's words. Concentrating on same old 'traffic wars' scene just doesn't have that freshness anymore. It's probably the war over pollution or the war to get into quality schools, maybe corporate infighting, or the 'housing wars' perhaps. There are too many wars; it's the essence of vulgarity. No impact. The bosses have probably hit on some new idea. Hey, the 'marriage proposal war' might be pretty funny. The 'war against alcoholism', or maybe the 'war s to stamp out scandal'? I had no idea what kind of war they were onto.

As I sleepily thought about all this, my boss said it, "A real war..."

"But other stations have already beaten WWII to death."

"Pull yourself together, man. We've got a declaration of war on our hands."

"What? It's already started? Where?" I sit up. The foggiest was gone. The Middle East?

"Here in Japan," he said.

"That's idiotic..."

I stretched out on the bed, still gripping the receiver. It's a bad joke. We've got a magnificent Peace Constitution. We're not stupid enough to trample on it to start a war, and not clever enough either.

"Hey, don't you dare go back to sleep. Someone has declared war against Japan."

"You're kidding me. What country would be crazy enough to..."

I jumped out of bed. A terrible feeling coursed through my body. Nuclear warheads, missiles, burnt ruins of cities, every conceivable kind of death. I glanced at my watch. How many minutes till the missiles will be flying overhead? Gotta start drinking like there's no tomorrow. I gotta get married, too. I've gotta to punch my spiteful boss and coworkers. I gotta read those books I bought and told myself I would read later. I should write a will, bury it, and communicate the idiocy of war to future generations. No, before that I've gotta go to the bank and withdraw all my savings. I wanna eat fried prawn one more time. I still haven't climbed Mt. Fuji. I wanna travel abroad before I die. I wanna try LSD...

"It's a small country in Africa, the Republic of Pagidia. Apparently it just gained independence."

"What a relief! Don't freak me out like that. If you're trying to be funny, make it clear you're joking..."

The sound of my getting back into bed provoked my boss' voice on the other end of the phone, "It's no joke. They really did declare war on us. Pagidia's combined fleet has already left port."

"That sounds like trouble. What have they got? A carrier? Nuclear submarines?"

"It appears they got two small warships for cheap from the American military, each about the size of a big fishing boat. Apparently they'll make shore here in 40 days."

"Big deal.' That's my impression."

"But this is most definitely a war. On top of that, we're the only station that's got this right now. We're going to get it out there quick and establish ourselves as the sole source for this story. Get in here now!"

"I'm starting to get the picture. We play our cards right and we can win the ratings game, right?"

I headed into the station and found what appeared to be a secret meeting in one of the rooms. "How did we get the scoop on this?" I asked.

"Pagidia just gained independence, and hasn't set up diplomatic offices here in Japan yet. Their representatives were walking around, asking foreign tourists where one should submit a declaration of war on Japan. A Belgian tourist whom we've put on the air before sent us a telegram when he caught wind of what they were up to. As far as news sources go, I'm afraid that's about it."

"Where is this country?" I asked, and one guy pointed to a map on the wall. The western portion of Africa is as jumbled as a real-estate broker's advertisement for rental properties.

"It's somewhere around here. The name isn't on the map yet. With their eyes on getting the prize of American-Soviet aid intended for developing countries, they gave independence a shot, but all the Americans gave them were two rag-tag ships. The Russians kicked in ten machine guns. The Americans and Russians aren't quite the soft touch they used be."

"But why declare war against Japan...?"

"They might just be taking it out on us. They're pissed off at the penny-pinching of the U.S and Russia and can't suppress their country's internal dissatisfaction anymore. They're venting their anger on us, or so one could reason. However, we really don't know any details."

"They must be nuts!"

"War is the product of insanity. It's a law, eternal and unchanging. Seriously, though, we've got to outwit the other stations for coverage. Let's get things moving..."

We managed to find the one man in Japan familiar with the situation in Pagidia, contracted him, and then locked him away in a hotel. He once worked for a small trading company and visited the country just once to sell a few sundries. He even had a photograph of two ships that looked like the two discounted and tattered American vessels otherwise known as Pagidia's war fleet.

That was all we had to go on, but they told me to make a 30-minute program by prime time that night. It was an impossible task if you ask me, but I always follow orders. I lit a fire under one of the new employees and, making sure our secret didn't leak, went about my preparations.

Somehow, we made it on time.

On air.

<We have a brand new show today, the beginning of a special report series dealing with a sudden state of emergency that could affect the very fate of our nation. And now a word from our sponsors...>

The commercials rolled, a leisure industry sponsor. A bowling alley, yacht club, and land shares for summer cottages. A very well-diversified developing company. The commercials ended. The melody from <The Enemy are Countless> played. We pulled together a small band dressed in military garb we found hanging around in the hall of the station and got them to perform. They were amateurish and nobody knew the music, but in a state of emergency you do what you can.

In an utterly solemn voice, the announcer speaks, <This is not a test. This morning, the Republic of Pagidia declared war upon us, the country of Japan. I repeat, this is not a test. This is not a joke; it is a most grave reality.

We are at war. The losses confirmed by our side thus far are zero...>

The special effects film finally arrived. Based on the photograph we had, it was a scene with the Pagidian fleet making knots, kicking up waves. Without knowing their flag's symbol, we made due by making their ensign flutter in the wind. But, what the hell is going on?! That bastard sound tech overlaid the audio with a military march.

In the director's room they were breaking out into a cold sweat when the phone started to ring. It's probably a complaint from some viewer. However, what came through was the emotional voice of a middle-aged man, "Oh my, that certainly takes me back. My heart tightened with emotion. My blood is tingling. *Banzai!*" What the hell is this guy talking about? It turns out he thought it was a picture of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force. The world is full of people clueless about the military.

We moved to the round-table discussion. We had Japan's one and only trading company employee cum-expert on Pagidia, along with a military commentator and a Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative who we forced to be on the show. The MC was one of our station's very own voice-over guys.

"This situation has certainly gotten serious, hasn't it? What does the government plan to do about it?"

The intelligent, smartly dressed Foreign Affairs official responded without cracking a smile, "Yes. We have still not received any reports. If what you say is true, then we do indeed have a problem. It is most regrettable. We shall look into the issue and take the appropriate steps. That is all that I can offer at this time."

The trading company employee pointed to the map on the wall, "This is the country in question. Yes, it's a fairly hot country. There are quite a few rain forests..."

"What about the country's economic climate?"

"I tried to sell them 100 dozen Japanese-made lighters, but they insisted on only 30 dozen, and at an even cheaper price than I offered."

Who made this guy a situational expert?

The MC turned to the military commentator, "Please, give us your opinion on the state of modern warfare and the current posture of the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force."

With an aim to sell himself to the audience, the critic pulls out his nice-guy smile, "All of this has taken me by surprise. Yes, I'm quite surprised. Even in this era of science and technology, I'm in the difficult position of having to report a lack of information concerning the opposing side's fleet capabilities. However, we have the support of the world's greatest military power, America's 7th Fleet." He seemed to be saying, "It'll probably work itself out in the end."

The businessman butted in, "Ah, I just remembered. The evening I closed the deal on the lighters, they had a rather worrisome ceremony. I thought they were celebrating the business deal, but they said it was in honor of the successful signing of a neutrality pact with the USA."

"If that's what has happened, then... Japan and Germany were once allies, but when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, we adhered to the clauses in the treaty we had with the USSR and didn't participate in that part of the war. America will be in a similar position, where it can't lend Japan a hand. Thus, we have no choice but to ask the United Nations to mediate."

"It appears that they haven't joined the UN."

Beating around the bush. I gave the signal to end the meeting in grand fashion with a military march. But two old WWII Japanese military marches, <Luxuriant Sakura Tree, or the Color of Their Lapels?> and <Defeating Evil in the Name of Heaven>, got all mixed up and created a bizarre racket. When I waved my hands to indicate that they had gotten it wrong, they started a 60s American war protest song!

In the midst of all the panic, some new information arrived.

The announcer read, <This just in from the warfront: new information has confirmed the route Pagidia's fleet will take. Rather than making their way around Cape Horn, it appears that they plan to round the Cape of Good Hope and invade Japan via the Indian Ocean. All signs show that they will make landfall with the coast of Japan in approximately 40 days...>

It sounded more like a weather report.

When he was finished and the show had gone to commercial, the phones began ringing off the hook. They kept ringing even as the employees answering them divided up the work. It was actually quite simple. If someone asked 'are you serious?', the answer was 'yes'. To a 'what happens next?', one followed with 'keep watching and tune in tomorrow'. The response from the viewers was astounding. We were way ahead of the other studios regarding everything in connection to our story.

Guests began to flock at our beck and call. Things simply got easier. The next day we had statesmen, government officials, and specialists on the show and then wrapped things up nicely with a news update and round-table discussions. Everyone wanted to know what the government's stance was, but all they got were vague words and noncommittal answers:

"We are a peace-loving nation... most regrettable... via negotiations through diplomatic channels... might possibly be a misunderstanding... therefore, in accordance with... we will take careful steps to examine the situation as reports are made available... we must not forget public opinion... as quickly as possible... this is exceedingly... we must avoid taking any rash course of action... that is how we are currently viewing the situation under question."

"What about attacking and driving them back in the Indian Ocean?"

"No, that would be somewhat of an international issue..."

"But it wouldn't be too much different from taking them out after they've arrived on our doorstep, would it? Or are you saying that you don't particularly care if our shores are invaded?"

"No, we would never allow such a thing to happen. You can count on that."

"How exactly do you plan on handling this, then?"

"In my most humble and personal opinion, we live in a world where man can transplant hearts, and even travel to the moon..."

I'm not really sure how the moon got brought into the picture, but from the point of view of a speaker trying to preserve political viability, it probably makes sense. Granted, there is a certain comfort to be found in leaving things vague and muddled. The key to a successful TV series is avoiding definitive conclusions for as long as possible.

The reason for the declaration of war remained as unclear as ever. A man from a nearby Japanese consulate took a two-day jeep trip to Pagidia, but was taken prisoner and hasn't been heard from since. According to International Law, capturing hostiles is an acceptable thing to do.

There were various theories as to the reason for Pagidia's hostility. A few said it was due to a problem with Japanese tourists. It happens all the time these days; tourists thinking the shame won't follow them home commit some unspeakable cultural *faux pas* like mistaking Pagidia's national monument for a toilet, mistaking a toilet for a sacred shrine, confusing a sacred place for a brothel, pulling out money hidden in the folds of their underwear, etc. At some point a Japanese citizen must have succeeded in insulting Pagidia's national pride. Things like this happen all the time.

Or, it could have been the result of wild rumors consciously spread by a third country, like Japanese people killing and eating dogs, samurai warriors cutting down regular townspeople in the street with swords, political corruption running rampant, or men and women bathing together.

Every time the question of motive would arise, the businessman would get asked, "Gee, I wonder what the reason for all this could be. Maybe some third-rate trading company forced crappy lighters down their throats..."

"Heavens no. They may have been imitation Ronsons, but they were copies of the utmost quality. You would be wrong, sir, to think that I started this fire with a lighter. I'll bet it was some shaman with a hangover who heard a revelation from God or something..."

He wasn't much help. There's not much else we could do, because he was the only informant we had. The guy was living the high life. He got tired of being locked away in his hotel and started demanding women. We didn't want him being lured away by another channel, so we had to concede.

We also had occasion to drag a man from the Defense Agency onto the show: "Sir, what are your intentions?"

"We exist for the sake of the people of this country. Should we receive the order, we shall offer our blood, sweat and tears in defense of the Motherland. However, as we have not yet received such an order, any rash action on our part would be impermissible. Of course, our military band is a different story..."

Nothing useful. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs only offered more of the same: "This is an issue for the guys over in the African Affairs Department." "The officials in our UN bureau handle that." Some were saying that because it's an Asian country being attacked, it's this or that department's problem. "Well, if it's an invasion, that would be a domestic issue." "With unlawful entry into Japan, you're looking at the Ministry of Justice." "Maybe the harbor police can handle it?" "It's a matter of where the Ministry of Finance should send the money." "If we're talking about damage, then it's the Ministry of Construction." "The Ministry of International Trade and Industry should handle all issues regarding illegitimate foreign trade." "Ask the Science Council of Japan for their opinion." Nobody wanted to take responsibility. The Minister of every Ministry kept repeating over and over, "We still have not received any reports."

When pressed for an answer, the Prime Minister replied, "I will respect the decision of the Diet," but the Diet itself was still far from united.

Eventually, an out-of-power political party managed to come up with something resembling an opinion: "This is a plot by the government and the party in power. We have no doubt that it is all a charade, secretly engineered to expand Japan's military fortifications. It's all smoke and mirrors. There is a rumor that behind the scenes lie the remnants of a Nazi fascist regime manipulated by merchants of death. We want the whole story!"

The government flinched, but rebutted with a request to be fully informed should such information actually exist. That shut them up. There was no way to calculate where or how much money the merchants of death were making.

Once one explanation would surface, some variation on it or the exact opposite would inevitably follow, "There are those who say that anarchist Trotskyists, jealous of the flamboyant success of Che Guevara, have infiltrated Africa and are now targeting Japan's obviously flawed defenses."

"You could also reason that the masterminds behind the Kennedy assassination have their weight behind a second, master conspiracy."

"With the world's eyes drawn to this fiasco, 'they'll' use the opportunity to advance 'their' true initiative."

Every time someone opened their mouth, there was a new conspiracy theory. The sponsors, their appetites whet, offered a competition the next day: a summer home to the person whose theory proved to be correct. What a chance for viewers to participate in the show! The responses flooded in. A computer was brought into the station to throw out all the similar responses determine their order of arrival.

<A contagious disease induced group insanity. If they're tried for war crimes they can't be found guilty, by reason of insanity.> <It's the doings of aliens from planet Invader!> <That fleet is cursed, and the sailors are all under its control.>

Some even wrote in with a plagiarized version of Alain: <The fountainhead of war lies somewhere between honor and boredom.>

<They believe the rumors claiming that a gold-filled country in the far east called Japang was broken asunder in a recent earthquake and has money lying about for all to pick up.>

They were nothing but groundless theories, but we couldn't rightly dismiss them out of hand either. When we set up a "New Theory Corner" on the show our popularity skyrocketed. It was certainly more interesting than having the highly educated, cultured literati parroting "I can really understand what that country's going through." Some people actually came up with opinions worth listening to, though: <Once and for all, the truth! Television stations caught up in a "Wag the Dog" conspiracy!>, a theory that mass media sources consulting in dark rooms and clamoring for fresh news decided to create a news story. That's probably what I'd think too, if I were a viewer. However, I was on the side of the broadcaster. I couldn't let that sort of opinion see the light of day. I buried it in the name of censorship. After all, we were in a state of war.

New theories were coming in one after the other, but everyone shrewdly kept their mouths shut when it came down to what should be done about the situation. No one dared to say, "Those impudent bastards! They're breaking the law! Sink the suckers with a single shot!" Everyone knew what would happen if they did. At the same time, they couldn't say, "Just sit on your hands and get invaded!" Again, everyone realized what would happen if they did. By not focusing on the most important issue at hand, the public's enthusiasm began to be confined more and more to the creation of new theories. As the bizarre theories kept piling up, I started to get a little worried.

What the hell is going on? I had no idea. They must have been insane to think they could invade us with two floating rust buckets. However, if those two buckets were carrying some secret weapon of mass destruction, it would make all the sense in the world. I couldn't help feeling it was some kind of trap. Dealt with sloppily, something terrible could happen. There was just no way to tell which way things would turn. Ambiguity was breeding apprehension. It was like having one foot in quicksand. How long could our little game of "see no evil, hear no evil" last?

Newspapers ran editorials that demanded that the Diet go into recess and that the public's opinion be sought. However, they had no concrete data. The electorate of our illiterate, television-loving, vitamin-guzzling nation got a little worried too. We didn't have time to hold elections.

I started to run out of ideas for the program, so I invited some children who were fanatic about the military into the station and started a quiz show. These kids were amazing. They knew everything: how to unearth mines, the details of missile performance, the right way to clean a cannon, everything. Our country's children might even be superior to NATO's Chief of General Staff in this respect. I wouldn't put it past the little brats to make The Bomb.

According to images taken from an American space satellite, Pagidia's fleet had rounded the Cape of Good Hope and was entering the Indian Ocean. With fair winds and following seas, they would hit mainland Japan in 30 days.

The Japanese government finally received Pagidia's declaration of war. It had first gone to the closest Japanese diplomatic establishment to Pagidia, but all they did was muddle over who should take responsibility. They finally ended up handing over money for travel expenses and ordered the Pagidians to take it to another consulate somewhere else. On and on, it kept being passed around like a hot potato until at last it reached the Homeland via the Japanese embassy in France. However, the Japanese government avoided confirming this. Accepting the fact that this had turned into a war would be awkward. I got a copy of the declaration and put it on TV.

As had become custom, the businessman was dragged onto the show again.

He had begun the slow descent into alcoholism, but we were somehow able to give him a couple of injections and stand him up straight. Straight to the questions:

"These letters here look rather odd. What do they mean when translated into Japanese?"

"Ummm, 'The Republic of Pagidia hereby declares a state of war upon Japan.' That's about it. I tell 'ya, it isn't easy getting to where you can read a dialect this well. Actually, that reminds me of a funny story..."

"Let's save it for next time. There are 5 or so X's lined up at the end of the document here, your thoughts..."

"That's a little dicey. It's a little bit of "you bastards", some nonsense, "kill them all", "don't try and stop us", and "we aren't kidding" all in one. I can't really find a suitable equivalent in Japanese."

"So you're saying it's a curse."

"No, it's not necessarily that. There are also times when this phrase is used to express friendship. There's an accent mark that differentiates between the two. However, that accent mark isn't written here... What a pity..."

A map hung in the backdrop of the studio, showing a steadily progressing line behind Pagidia's fleet. There's a rule of thumb that says wars are great for a society's knowledge of geography. It was certainly working then. Before I knew it I had learned the location of countries like Mauritius and the flow of currents in the Indian Ocean.

Even at a snail's pace, it hardly feels good to have somebody slowly getting closer and closer to you. It makes people irritable. "The government should consult with the Americans and figure out a solution to this problem. Haven't we been faithful to America for all these years for this exact reason?"

"You have a very good point. We are doing everything that we can. However, there are still a few unresolved issues between America and us. With this in mind, we need to fix this problem by thinking from a broader perspective."

The Americans were getting worried about the talks not making any progress, too. After all, they were the ones who sold the Pagidians a fleet at garage-sale prices after signing a neutrality treaty with them. Moreover, ever since the Vietnam War, a slip of the tongue could cause America's allergy towards small, developing countries to flare up. "You're not going to get anywhere with the President. The Prime Minister should hop over to America himself and speak honestly with the man that has the expertise and power to deal with these things, the head of the CIA."

As soon as one vigorous opinion would appear, an even more vigorous and opposing opinion would be right on its tail, "You've got to be kidding us. It's obvious that the CIA is tangled up in the shadows of this operation. It would be far too dangerous for them to let the cat out of the bag now. The politicians of our fine country are far too easy going and honest to be depended on to do the right thing."

Somebody proposed the idea that we ask the Soviet Union. However, the Soviets were pawing off their goods at reduced prices too, and wouldn't step in to arbitrate by then. After asking the Arab Union for help, we were told to break off relations with Israel and then come back. Looking to countries like Western Germany and Italy only produced worries over the possibility of rumors being spread about a revival of the World War Two Axis. France and England opted out on account of the subtle nature of their interests in Africa. The Argentines told us that they would certainly lend us a ship, but that we would have to make the actual attack on our own.

Accompanying each of these realizations was a subsequent deepening sense of helplessness everyone vaguely felt. We could see that those foreign countries were either being cold, or selfishly thinking only of themselves. The ice-cold chill of isolation crept upon us. While we were dithering about, pleading with all of our allies for help, a bizarre new international opinion towards our country emerged. "Somewhere within all that panic there must lay a guilty conscience," or "There must have been some unforgivable catalyst leading teeny tiny Pagidia to commit to such a course of action,"

or "We want to send the Pagidians a few informal words of encouragement."

I turned in a mission statement to the sponsors and suggested the following: In order to steer the current world opinion in our favor, we must appeal to the people of the world. How about dispatching an envoy of public entertainers to plead our innocence? We formed a group called "The Wonderful Ambassadors", made up of an all women's opera troupe, *ikebana* teachers, magicians and the like. The formation and farewell party of said group took up nearly two whole shows.

The special envoy certainly had an effect. Everywhere they went they were flooded with requests for hotel reservations for the day of the invasion. It seemed like the people were interested in observing the goings on. Corporate sponsors in the leisure industries happily set about accepting the business. It would bring in a lot of foreign capital.

At one point, the higher ups came to me, "We've heard word about some plans the other stations are working on. It seems as though they're going to rent a ship from some country and head out to the Indian Ocean to get some live footage of the Pagidian fleet underway."

"Figures."

"Our station can't afford to lose on this one. We have to do something bigger. We're going to land on their ship with a helicopter and interview them directly."

"What a great idea. Our ratings will soar through the roof."

"I'm glad you're on board. Can you leave now? Take that businessman as a translator and get the hell out there. Everything's been prepared."

"Alright. Let's go, I guess."

Like it or not, we grabbed a camera and took a jet to India where we rented a Greek ship, outfitted it with a helicopter and started our approach. After traveling for quite some time, we finally made sight of the ships. They'd been painted entirely white. There were radiant images painted in primary reds and yellows and greens all over the hulls. Like a mask worn by a voodoo doctor, it had a touch of the black arts to it, overflowing with primitive energy, exotic, and colorful.

We flew our white flag and got an acceptant response. We maneuvered over in our helicopter, but everything didn't feel quite right. If we were to get strafed by a round of machine gun fire, that would be the end. Thankfully, we were able to land without incident. Adolescent, gun-toting sailors in white uniforms quickly surrounded us. For a moment their churlishness was grating, but then I thought for a bit and realized that they were our enemies.

I ordered the businessman to translate, "Take us to your captain," and in short order he eliminated any doubts I may have had about his language abilities by performing a wretchedly overdone display of hand and arm flailings. It looked like he was dancing. When I opened my mouth to complain he apologized, nearly on the verge of tears. With an eye to gaining instant television fame, he had exaggerated his abilities. Or so he said. I was appalled, but at that point there was no longer a way back. If we went home with this fiasco in our hands, we'd be the laughing stock of the media community.

However, he managed to secure an audience with the captain using the total of 20 words that he knew. In a surprising twist, the captain turned out to be a woman in her early twenties. She was beautiful, with what appeared to be a bit of Anglo Saxon in her blood. Her legs were sleek, her style, fashionable. Her hair fluttered in the sea breeze. The white captain's uniform she wore suited her form nicely. We couldn't have asked for a more perfect subject for the camera. She bubbled with passion, vigor, and command.

I conducted the interview while holding the camera myself.

She understood a little bit of English: "You're really quite charming," I said.

"Thank you. I have been called Pagidia's Joan of Arc."

"What is that flag on the mast?"

"Pagidia expects that every man will do his duty."

"Those feel a little bit like Lord Admiral Nelson's words..."

"We do not abide by your copyright laws. Therefore, there will be no complaining. Give me liberty or give me death; this is my resolve."

"Could you please explain your reasons for declaring war?"

"In a word, a hippopotamus was punched."

"Please, a message to the Japanese people."

"Resistance is futile. Come out with your hands up.' That's it."

"Almost like lines from a detective movie, huh? Could you please say something with a bit more substance? Like your battle strategy, conditions for surrender, or whether or not you have any secret weapons?"

"Are you kidding? We aren't playing games here. This is war. It would be a different story if you were willing to take up residence on this ship and fight with us for the liberation of Japan, though."

I had a most sublime obligation to return to my television station. "No, I mustn't betray my Motherland. I'd like to know: just what are you liberating Japan from?"

"Don't all countries use these phrases in times of war? It means, 'We will do as we please.'"

"What kind of man do you prefer?"

"One who is sincere and has the ability to make a good living. However, if I had to choose between work and marriage, right now I'd choose work."

"Do you like Coca Cola?"

"Yes."

We could make some money off advertising with that. If not, we could always dub Pepsi over the audio. The waves began to really rock the ship. It seemed like a good idea to take off soon.

"Well, we're going to have to get going. By the way, what is your name?"

"Gaboia Pokin, Pagidian Navy, serial number 13588. Let the next time we meet be on the battlefield."

"We shall pray for your victory."

I put the apologetic translator on the helicopter and we lifted off. I wanted to do a little sightseeing around Southeast Asia, but there was no chance of that happening. We went straight home. We needed to leverage our ratings with the video we'd just taped.

A voice actress with an extremely seductive voice was brought into the studio to do the dubbing. Who the hell reads subtitles? We got an announcer with an old-fashioned voice to do the narration, <Ahh, a fleet of ships raises a frothy wake, bathed in the sun's rays upon the waters of the Indian tropics. The clear eyes of young soldiers gleam brightly. The hand at the helm is none other than Pagidia's own Joan of Arc: the lovely Gaboia Bokin. Will the fate that awaits them in the East bear flowers or torment...?>

As I had hoped, the music supervisor didn't use a military march. Instead he opted for an equally idiotic "Anchors Aweigh". As though the mighty American fleet had raised anchor, it brought about an altogether overblown effect.

The beauty of Gaboa was striking, with her skin tanned the color of wheat. It caught the viewers' attention. In the commentary to the video, the phrases "what astounding gallantry", and "uncommon gallantry" were repeated again and again, and became cliché overnight. New words like 'gallantrical' and 'gallantism' caught on among the public. By the time the words reached a mass audience, it was already too late to point out to people the error in usage. As is customary with this sort of thing, we tried to inform the people of the proper use of the words, but it became impossible to keep up. It got to the point where a song called "The Gallantrical March" became a hit single.

Someone called into the station and asked, "What do you think you're doing, glorifying the enemy?" We didn't let that comment reach the light of day, though. The word 'enemy' is taboo now, you see. Identifying "them" as the enemy would be the same as confirming the existence of a war, and that would bring shower of accusations down upon us: 'war mongers', 'pugnacious', etc.... Of course, nobody felt like we had an enemy at all. An enemy must arouse feelings of animosity, be cruel and unsightly, powerful, and abhorred.

Naturally, the station got a lot of pressure from political circles, but the president of our sponsoring corporation also was a heavy contributor to the "powerful politician's fund". Pressure from the government was cancelled out by the political influence of our sponsor, and nothing untoward happened to us. The people's true power lies in remote controls.

Fashions based on 'The Gaboa Style' hit big. Needless to say, the fabric industry was obviously pleased. The streets were inundated with snow-white Navy captain's uniforms. It was all gallantly gallantic, so to speak.

Amongst the ranks of pure-hearted young men, there were a few rash enough to volunteer for the service. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs told them they were barking up the wrong tree, because it turns out the guys were trying to volunteer for the Pagidian Navy. The government wanted to punish them, but couldn't. With the government still not accepting the existence of a war, it legally had no means to control the situation. It cringed and put on an ugly face. The Anti-Establishment youngsters were pleased with themselves. A few outraged people tried to attack the kids, but a police unit stepped in to break up the violence.

A large portion of the population agreed with the actions of the police unit. After all, a civil war would cause more than a few problems. But hey, we're all Japanese here, aren't we?! Violence just won't do. If we could just talk about what's going on, we should be able to clear things up. However, when it came down to figuring out exactly what to say, nobody had any good ideas. Ambiguous and non-committal, that's the way everyone likes it. They can sympathize with those shouting support for the Pagidians, but at the same time they don't want to lose the peace that they have. As usual, though, they keep their mouths shut. How the hell should they know what to do? The prevailing mood is that *somebody* will do *something*.

Some women show up in the streets asking passersby to help revive an old custom: the sewing of a thousand red stitches by a thousand different women onto a white sash in order to pray for the safety of our troops. I called them into the station as quickly as I could. The young viewers were ecstatic after hearing about this custom for the first time. "Who will you send it to?", I asked the women. Mumbles. "It's just that we couldn't sit around doing nothing anymore." They're more straightforward than I expected. Everyone knew that they should be doing something, but no one would tell us what to do. That's the situation we're in.

Of course, those old ladies may have simply been jockeying for their 15 minutes of fame.

With the Thousand Stitch Sash gaining popularity, a machine to produce them in under a second was invented. Blouses with the Thousand Stitch Sash pattern were produced in massive quantities. The designers put on a fashion show for the dresses on television.

"They've gone too far," one elderly man sighed. The next week we had a guy on the show who brought with him a machine that he had invented. It could automatically fold a thousand paper cranes, an old Japanese symbol for peace. Thirty minutes after pushing the button to start the folding, a thousand paper cranes would come out the other end. With a self-satisfied look on his face, the creator says, "The arrival of peace has now been expedited."

"Geez, this war will never end.," one of the audience members said, nearly in tears. He quickly covered his mouth. If you let your mouth run during wartime something untoward might happen.

The ratings for my show remained unmatched. They were as high as they had ever have been, and we slipped into a happy cycle of sponsor generosity producing audience mirth, which in turn produced more spending by the sponsors. I couldn't help but wonder just what everyone else was thinking. Actually, it was pretty self-evident: the situation was *interesting*. It's the expectation of the unknown. First class seats to observe the chaos. Sit back and relax, in the end somebody will come along and wrap everything up for you. That's the way it's always been, and that's the way it will be this time, too. If we just shut up and enjoy ourselves, everything will work out in the end. Enjoyment is a fundament right of humankind.

Who should provide all the solutions? What good can one screaming madman who takes everything so seriously possibly hope to do? If you get up on a soap-box and yell for real, people will think you're a boor.

The Pagidian fleet pressed on through the gap between Malaysia and Sumatra, the Straights of Malacca. Groups of Japanese tourists showed up to take in the sight from the shore, yelling whatever the spirit moved them to say: "Go get 'em!!", "Burn in hell!!!", and "Hey sweetie, look over here!!!" Sure, the hecklers felt refreshed and happy afterwards, but 'dirty Japanese' started to gain popularity in the surrounding areas.

The fleet cut North across the Borneo Sea, heading for the South China Sea. Ten days to mainland Japan. On the way, though, it made port calls in a few places to pick up water, rations, and fuel. The Japanese government used its diplomatic stations abroad to request that the local ports not provide assistance to the enemy, but the calls lacked any significant persuasive power. Harboring the fleet in their own country and then refusing to provide assistance would not be a good idea. No one can turn away an African country like that. The government looked to America, but it refused to take a stance. In the end, though, the local governments decided to accept Japan's demand, but it would always happen *just* after the Pagidians had left port. Pure diplomatic art.

Afterwards, the countries involved came complaining to the Japanese embassies and consulates: "It's bitter-sweet for us. Aren't you the ones at war? If you truly *are* still producing rockets, why don't you just smash one of them into the Pagidians? If you can't do that, you should go out to the Indian Ocean and take them head on in a battle at sea. What ever happened to the legacy of General Togo? It's the responsibility of enemies to fight each other. Even in boxing, wouldn't you agree that it's embarrassing to concentrate on both the fight and the referee? If you haven't the will to fight, then you should throw in the towel and grovel at their feet. These are the rules the world runs by, yet you refuse to abide by them and then come crying to us. Our respect for your country has been diminished. We misjudged you. What has happened to your former courage and conviction? Have you sold the ways of your samurai, the very essence of your Japanese spirit, for financial prosperity?"

"No, not one bit. To be frank with you, and I'm sure this will sound a little odd, we don't really understand how things came to be this way either. It could be some conspiracy of American imperialism. If that's not the case, then it must be the result of cultural infiltration from the Communist Bloc."

"Since when has your nation been one that passes off blame to others? Pull yourselves together."

"Yes, we have lost our dignity." The Japanese lowered their heads in shame, but in their heart of hearts that's not what they really felt.

Around that time, the Pagidian fleet had become the topic of water-cooler conversations everywhere. Hour by hour the fleet's progress was broadcast by satellite. My program bought those images and aired them every now and then. In America, plans

for turning the war into a Broadway musical progressed. The general public's excitement began to build. Who would have thought that America, our last hope, would begin to show anti-Japanese sentiments...?

A special envoy was dispatched and went crying to America, "It's just too much. We have never betrayed your country. We've done everything that we could for you up until now. Your treatment is merciless...."

"How about we lend you nice little nugget of knowledge? Thanks to the neutrality treaty between Pagidia and ourselves, our military bases in Japan are safe from attack. Flee to them. Or, how about this? Why don't you turn the whole of Japan into one big American base? That way you would avoid getting trapped into this war."

"Don't smirk at me like that. Please, take what we say seriously. Help us, please."

"I'm really very sorry. As I'm sure you know only too well, since the founding of our nation it's been our policy to side with the underdog. For example, we gave you our support in the Russo-Japanese war. In the first World War we lent a hand to the British and French on account of their vulnerability. After hearing about your actions in China during World War II, we offered our strength to the Chinese. We helped the South Vietnamese because of the pitiful situation they were in. The only exception was the war in the Pacific, but that was your fault. There will be no more Pearl Harbor. Help the weak and baffle the strong, aid those countries that are all alone. We're the world's biggest Papa Bear. Do you understand?"

"We didn't realize the world was going to be this harsh. We will re-evaluate our childish behavior and admonish those at fault. But please, just this once, help us. Think of us as one of the tiny countries that you like to help."

"Sorry. If we go against our country's policy, we ourselves will be divided internally. The good Lord helps those who help themselves. Besides, what happened to the weapons we've allowed you to have in the past? You passed them off to foreign countries and constructed high-rise buildings with the money, did you not? We'll give you a nuclear weapon. Fight with that."

The special envoy went back to Japan with no results in hand. His only souvenir was a frown. There were a few people who protested his spineless diplomacy and pelted him with eggs at the airport.

It was already too late to whine about not having a spy network or having failed to do any research on Pagidia. The government requested help from foreign spy agencies, but the money began to add up, and no solid results were forthcoming. All of the reports differed from each other. Begging at the feet of foreign spies brings out the best in people. Come on, we don't have much time left!

The government held a secret meeting. Desperate times call for desperate measures. No matter what happens, we've got to get the whole country on the same page. It would be convenient if somebody died. From an accident or pollution or whatever, if there's a victim, people will get serious. Somebody has to die. Let's make it happen. We'll get some guy to accept his fate and fly a helicopter towards the fleet. He'll probably get shot down, and we'll make the announcement with the utmost regret.

The government managed to convince a terminally ill patient to do it. He took off, but on the way there he got scared and made an unscheduled landing. He got saved by a Russian vessel, went through Siberia and Sweden, and before anyone knew it he had defected to America. There, the full truth came out. He underwent some medical tests in America. The doctors found out that his disease was curable, and then the guy realized that he had been tricked. There would be no fidelity to the Motherland.

He announced to the world that he would write a tell-all book, received a huge sum of money from an American publisher, bought a sports car, floored it once, got into a car accident, and died. A hapless life.

The Pagidian fleet passed the East Okinawan Sea. There was nothing to do but pray for divine intervention. Even a little intervention, and everything would be okay. There were those who prayed with all their might. There more who thought that someone would do all the praying for them. Just a little intervention wouldn't stop the ships. There were some people who at least tried to plant underwater mines, but fishing companies got all in a tizzy and demanded financial redress. They claimed it would be dangerous, and asked that flags be put above the mines, etc.

Of their own accord, young kids began organizing themselves in to a volunteer army. They wore old WW2-style headbands from the days of the Japanese empire, made bamboo spears and intoned Chinese poems. Their influences were a mix of Mori Ranmaru, Amakusa Shirô, Kyôkaku, and the Byakko Tai. They were a gallant bunch, and their numbers grew. There was word that they would gather at Sagami Bay. An American television station had learned that it would be the fleet's landing spot during an interview and made the news known to the whole world.

A police unit tried to disband the gathering at the bay, there was a battle, and both sides sustained injuries. The young militiamen called the police 'unpatriotic dogs' and got themselves got attacked some more. On the other hand, Pro-Pagidia students gathered under a welcome flag they had raised. The police forced them back, calling them all 'treacherous dogs'. All tuckered out, the members of the police unit gave up, "This is idiotic. We're not going to be involved in this anymore, so you two just do whatever you want."

"No, don't! Please, we beg of you, stay with us. We promise we'll behave," the kids reply, and both sides cried themselves tired. What the hell is going on?

Amongst the ranks of the Japanese Self Defense Force, strains from "Restless Waves in the Depths of the Bekira River" broke out, and there was an unsettling movement that demanded "Down with the weak government! Long live the patriots!" The government wet its pants and ran crying to the American military's 7th fleet, begging it to make preparations in case the worst should happen. On the other hand, it also wouldn't be very good for the American military to get caught up in the heat of battle and do something convenient, so the government asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs to keep an eye on the Americans.

Tourists swarmed from foreign countries, spies wandered about, pick pocketing ran rampant, smugglers schemed their way into the country during the confusion, the Red Cross was doing its best, the national rail workers went on strike, and the price of tobacco shot up. The world was in turmoil, and it was finally the eve of battle. Truth be told, though, the war had started long ago. I started having meetings with the station and the sponsors to talk about our ideas for the post-war period. At the same time, we started preparing for the live broadcast of the landing.

At long last, the fleet began closing in on the coast of the main island. It appeared on the horizon and gradually got bigger. The Grand Armada. The actual fleet didn't amount to anything more than 2 ships. The rest are the chartered ships of television stations from the world over.

The gawkers on the coast had been restrained to a certain extent, but the police unit was nervous. They were keeping a close eye on the surrounding area in case some madman tried to assassinate someone with a rifle. Things would get ugly if someone were crazy enough to kill the enemy on the battlefield or something. It would establish a new precedent in the court system.

The all-youth volunteer army holed themselves away in the mountains saying they'd provide small-unit guerrilla resistance. The leisure industry company whose summerhouse they used got some good PR out of it. The old Imperial flag fluttering lawlessly in the wind, kids wearing fake Che Guevarra-style mustaches, drinking Coca-Cola, and fretting over the Motherland. Some of the elder kids declared that they would utilize Czech tactics in their resistance, and took the liberty of changing the traffic separation lines on roads, setting up fake toll booths, and throwing the transportation system into chaos. If you tried to complain, they would reply with, "What's a few car accidents in the name of freedom?"

The Pagidian fleet halted its two small ships in the distance, loaded everyone into boats and made landfall. Their military flag flapped in the wind. It looked like there was a pirate symbol emblazoned on their flag. But further inspection revealed something else: two crossed pieces of firewood beneath a jar.

<As long as you don't resist, your lives will be spared. We won't eat you. We are civilized people.> Since there was no resistance to speak of, all 50 crew members made it safely to shore. The sponsors of my show had prepared for this day by gathering campaign funds from various financial sectors. However, the money wasn't for fighting. It was for skillfully taking care of business.

"We've been waiting for you, our most esteemed occupation soldiers. Please, step this way." Starting with Captain Gaboa Pokin, everyone was put into a vehicle and taken into the heart of the city with police motorcycles in protecting them in tight formation. As they began to entertain the group at a hotel, the Captain said, "What is this building?"

"This is a hotel that General MacArthur used at one point. It's the very best we have to offer. If you would first like to recuperate from your journey..."

"No, let's start the negotiations for ending this war first. Will you admit defeat? I'm sure you understand the situation you're in. Yes or no?"

"Please, let us not speak with such harsh words. With things as they are, I am sure you understand the situation."

"You'll pay us the reparation monies?"

"Well, the matter of how much will certainly depend upon our negotiations..."

The Pagidians demanded 100 million dollars, but considering Japan's prosperity, there were no difficulties. With that, everything was wrapped up nicely. Money is truly the most powerful weapon. We paid out the money with a great deal of fanfare, and in return, the Pagidians conceded to us the right to take care of the legal formalities.

A message of peace. A beautiful Captain greets the people from her hotel balcony, "I came, I saw, I conquered." Her words, blatantly stolen from Caesar, were liberally translated into Japanese as, "Everlasting friendship and peace for both our countries." The crowd raised a cheer. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. Everything's fine. I knew somebody would do something. The crowd seemed to feel as though they had known what would happen all along, like at the end of a detective novel where we all invariably mumble, "Hmph, exactly as I thought."

Everything's fine. A happy ending. Water under the bridge. Yesterday's enemy is today's friend. All that is left is to entertain. Entertaining foreign visitors is a nice feeling. We show them *kabuki*, *nô* theatre, *sake*, *tempura*, *Nikkô*, the bullet train, Kyoto, an electronics factory, souvenirs, pearls, cameras, dancing *geisha*, the usual. They're brainwashing techniques. Television appearances, smiling faces, an offering of flowers from a young lady wearing a long-sleeved kimono. With all this, how could you call Japan a bellicose nation? Shake your head and say you're dissatisfied and we'll kill you. Come again some time. Meticulous empathy, eh? Goodbye, goodbye. Farewell. *Sayônara*.

I told my superiors, "Give me some leave. I haven't had a vacation this whole time. Splurge on a bonus for me too. A special allowance for war-time work. After this I guess that it's back to the old drawing board for new show ideas."

“Yep...” my boss started to say when his phone rang. He listened for a moment, and after the call ended he said, “...That may not be the possible. It seems that the Republic of Banya formed a neutrality treaty with America and has now declared war on us.”

“Where is that?”

“They’re saying that it’s a small island in the South Pacific.”

“I see. It’s obvious that our war fighting skills have deteriorated, but it seems like our end game strategies are equally poor. I’ve got a bad feeling about this.”

“Me too.”

The Story

When a freshly-minted country with a neutrality pact, 10 Russian machine guns and 2 bargain basement American ships decides to invade one of the world’s most advanced countries after one of its hippopotamuses gets bitch-slapped, the lines between fiction and satire become blurred. When I first read this story I couldn’t tell if the author was screaming a call-to-arms at Japan’s pacifist public, or just making fun of them. Every page of the original Japanese document is full of jabs: the ‘authorities’ we see on TV may not know all they seem to, avoiding blame is the key to politics, war hysteria is an abstract idea controlled by the media, and a game-show host becomes a respected source of newsworthy information. In the end, though, when we find that Japan won’t be brought to its knees by Audrey Hepburn in a Navy captain’s uniform, the joke is really on the Japanese people. All of that worrying, crying, fear and anxiety are assuaged, and the Japanese people can finally get down to what they’re best at: entertaining people and showing off their unique culture to foreigners. Bear in mind, though, that this story was written in the 1970s, when Japan was first being explored by mass numbers of curious foreigners. The satire here comes from the perspective of a Japanese person who was a little disgusted by the desire of his own people to cater to the amusements of foreigners. The Japanese are unable to defend themselves anymore, but they certainly know how to throw a good party.

Another major theme in the story is the shaky alliances between countries. America’s commitment to Japan’s safety is called into question more than a few times. There is a rather famous event that took place around the time of the writing of this story that had a large effect on the consciousness of the Japanese public and opinion towards the re-armament of the Japanese military. A man by the name of Yukio Mishima entered the Japanese Self Defense Force’s (JSDF) main base in Tokyo under the pretense of showing the commanding officer (CO) a rather old and famous Japanese sword. After gaining an audience, he proceeded to take the CO hostage and demanded to speak to all the soldiers on the base from the balcony. He gave a rousing 30-minute speech in 7 minutes before he was booed off his pulpit. Mishima was the commander of his own privately trained army, and it was his intention to bring back the glory of the old Japanese military by changing Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which forbids the creation of a standing army. Shamed and with a belly full of failure, Mishima retired to the room where the CO was tied up and committed *seppuku*. In a bloody ritual from old Japan, he stuck a sword into his own stomach and cut a 10-centimetre gash before the helpers standing behind him finished the job by cutting off his head. The event sent shockwaves through Japanese society. The media had a field day. After that, the effects could slowly be found in fiction being produced at the time. It is my feeling that this story is one of them. Whether ‘Ahh, Motherland!’ is satire or a wake-up call, I leave the decision up to you. I personally feel it’s a real funny story, intended to give the Japanese people pause to think about the absurdity of their daily lives.

The Translation

Some of the hardest things to translate in this story were the song names. It takes a lot of creativity to take the refined and meaningful name of a song and translate it as concisely and elegantly as the original. Usually it’s just impossible. Try your hand at the following example:

「ばんだの桜か襟の色」

‘Is it a sakura tree (cherry tree) with lush, hanging branches (a deep pink color), or the color of lapels? (in reference to what the lapels of uniformed Japanese soldiers looked like during WWII)’

As is plain to see, my English translation with all of its explanations is pretty good. It contains all of the cultural information that one would need to know in order to understand the song title exactly as a Japanese person would. However, it is unusable. Am I going to

put that monstrosity into my awesome translation and ruin the flow of the story? Heck no. In the end, I went with ‘Luxuriant Sakura Tree, or the Color of Their Lapels?’ I think it’s an ok translation, but I’m still not happy with it.

At times, there are songs that seem simple to translate, but the fact that their names are foreign in origin mean that the songs have correct foreign names. Take the following example:

「錨を上げて」 = ‘Ikari wo Agete’ = ‘Raise the Anchor’

Without my prior experience in the Navy, I would never have guessed that this could possibly be in reference to the famous Navy song ‘Anchors Aweigh’.

Another special debate arises when an author uses a quote. If it’s a quote by a famous American or Britain, then it’s no problem. The obvious thing to do is find the original quote by translating key words and doing a Google search along with the famous person’s name. What if the person quoted isn’t all that famous? Or, what if the quote was originally in French? I scoured the Internet to no avail to find one that came up in this story. I defy anyone to find the original French of a quote by Alain that goes something like this:

「戦争の原因は名誉と退屈のうちにある」

‘The fountainhead of war lies somewhere between honor and boredom.’

Even if you do find it, give me a better translation of the French than what I already have. Or, you could put the original French in your translation and alienate your readers. What I came up with is a bastard translation that has already been filtered through one translation process into Japanese, but I think it sounds pretty freaking sweet.

The tense in this story, and the perspectives that it’s being told from, are all over the place. In the original Japanese it’s quite natural, but translated directly into English it becomes a confusing nightmare. Overall, the story is being told in the historical present, defined by a dictionary as being: ‘The present tense used in the narration of events set in the past.’ There are claims that this tense exists in many languages in order to make recounting stories that occurred in the past a more active and involved activity. It’s what happens when your uncle Louie tells his favorite story for the 11th time: ‘So I says to the guy, I says...’ While I was translating this story, I didn’t realize it was in the historical present until I got to the 2nd page. That was partially because I’m an idiot, and partially because the Japanese wasn’t very obvious about it. Normally there would be a string of past tense verbs that would tip the reader off immediately to the story being written about past events, but this story was different. My translation is still a mess of confusing tenses, but I think that accurately reflects the Japanese in a way. Take these sentences for example:

‘I lay down on the bed, still gripping the receiver.’

‘I gotta read those books I bought and told myself I would read later.’

‘The sound of my getting back into bed provoked my boss’ voice...’

There are numerous other examples. The three above are only from the second page. Re-read the story and see if you can find some other examples!

Translation is probably not as easy as you think.

A machine will never successfully translate a novel that anyone will want to read.

Translation is really fun.

Cancelled Flight

by: Saburō Kawamoto

They waited for an hour, but the plane never took off in the end. Hakodate was in a total white-out.

“They don’t get quite as much snow there as in Sapporo, but the wind blows stronger on a city by the Straight, so they often experience blizzards in winter,” or so one of the women working for airline explained to the passengers.

“I guess there’s nothing we can do about the cancellation, huh?”

Takao said to his wife Noriko, his eye on a businessman complaining to the employees at the airline’s service counter.

“It’s not like we’re in a hurry on this vacation. Why don’t we try again later?” Noriko was calm, relaxed.

“Even with it snowing as hard as it is, it’ll probably stop by tomorrow.”

While listening to the explanation from the employee at the counter, Takao changed their flight arrangements to the next day. He called the hotel in Hakodate from a public phone, explained the situation and got their reservations moved back a day. Tourists are sparse in Hakodate during February, so they gladly accepted his request.

“That’s that. Let’s try again tomorrow,” Takao said to his wife matter of factly.

He had returned to find Noriko in a chair, waiting. He never had this much flexibility back when he was working. In the past, he might have been at the counter like that other businessman, noisily asking, “Why won’t you fly? When are we taking off?” Now that he’d retired, however, there was plenty of time. Getting upset wouldn’t change anything. It seemed to Takao that he hadn’t felt that way in a long time.

“What should we do? Shall we go home?” Noriko asked.

“It would be pretty boring to head home now after getting all of our stuff ready to go.”

The passengers, who had given up hope, began to disappear one by one from the lobby. The businessman stuck to his guns at the counter, making calls left and right on his cell phone.

“Why don’t we eat breakfast somewhere and head home?” Noriko suggested.

They had been scheduled for the first flight of the morning, so neither of them had eaten breakfast. The plan had been to get breakfast at the morning market in front of the main Hakodate train station after the plane landed. Noriko had even decided beforehand that she would eat the salmon roe and rice bowl. She had also talked about getting a side dish that included an unbroken placenta of salmon eggs.

“At this hour, though, they’re probably not open yet. Plus, the restaurants in the airport are pretty dull. I wonder if there’s anyplace good around here.”

On account of the flight cancellation, all of a sudden the two of them had a full day’s worth of time on their hands. This, too, must be one of the privileges of a man who had retired. The hour hand had just swung past eight in the morning. Were it this time on a weekday, he’d have been busily getting ready to head for the office.

“Honey, there’s this thing that I’ve been wanting to eat for a while.”

“What’s that?” he asked.

“You used to talk about there being this really good stand-up noodle shop, that one that’s open early in the morning.”

Ah, Takao suddenly remembered. On days when he had to work late at the office and then come in early the next morning for a meeting, Takao used to stay in a hotel in Ningyō-chō-chō that was a 10 minute taxi ride from the office, rather than taking the hour-long taxi ride home. It was a family-run place called City Pensione that he liked for its cozy, quiet atmosphere. On the mornings after stayed there for the night, Takao would often drop by at a certain stand-up noodle shop before heading into work. It was part of a chain of stores found in the area from Nihonbashi to the Ginza that was known for being able to hold its own against the independent noodle shops.

“The *soba* there is to die for,” or so he would say. It appeared Noriko hadn’t forgotten the place.

“Are you sure that’s what you want?” Takao asked skeptically.

“Yeah. I’ve always wanted to eat there at least once. You always went on and on about how good their *soba* is.”

That decided it. The two of them would head for Ningyô-chô-chô, rent a room, set down their things, and then go eat *soba* while standing up.

“After that we can wander around the lower parts of town. Asakusa and the Sumida River are both a short walk away.”

“That settles it, right?”

Noriko stood up and led the way to the Keihin Express train station.

Last summer Takao quit his job of 36 years at the paper. He still hadn’t reached retirement age, but that summer he had health complications causing him to spend two weeks in the hospital. After that, Takao decided to call it quits. His stomach had taken a beating. The doctor chuckled when he told Takao it was due to decades of stress, and that things would be fine once he quit his job.

Their children had already started their own lives.

The loan on the house was already paid off.

When Takao told Noriko that he wanted to take it easy for a while, she agreed and nonchalantly suggested that they go on vacation together. One of the things Takao had always liked about Noriko was her easygoing nature, but he had never appreciated it more than at that moment. After hearing his retired superiors from work talk about how often their wives complained to them about less money coming in, Takao truly appreciated having a mellow wife who never brought up such things.

Work at the paper had been tough. He had been transferred to various offices far from home on more than one occasion. Consequently, he left the raising of the kids to Noriko. When he recalled it now, Takao could literally count on one hand the number of times the two of them had traveled alone with each other, which probably explained why she suggested they go on vacation together. The holiday to Hakodate marked their first ‘Trip for Two’ since he had quit working.

There was a supermarket near the house that handed out tickets every time you gave them business. Before Noriko knew it, the tickets had added up to a free vacation to Hakodate.

“This time it’s my treat,” she had said happily. But the coupons were limited to use in the off-peak season.

“Beggars can’t be choosers,” Noriko rationalized. “Besides, it will be nice to go when there aren’t so many people.” For someone who had only taken small daytrips with her other friends who had sent their children off into the world, she certainly made herself sound knowledgeable.

“The best times to travel are February, June, and November. The rooms and transportation should all be empty, so it’ll be easy to relax.”

And with that, their February trip to Hakodate was decided.

The hotel in Ningyô-chô stood in the shadow of the large City Hotel next-door. It had roughly 40 rooms. Since it catered mostly to individuals rather than large groups, it was quiet year round. The front desk was on the second floor. It had the feel of a small art gallery from the Ginza district, with three couches and a table. On many mornings while Takao was reading the paper in one of the sofas after checking out, the hotel staff would bring him green tea before he left for work. As a lover of Japanese food, it made Takao happy to find that the tea always came with a pickled plum next to it.

The two of them arrived at the hotel at a little before 10 a.m. They hadn’t made a reservation, but they were able to get a room easily on account of it being the off-season. While signing in at the front desk, Takao overheard a woman of about 30 asking the proprietress about the Arakawa River. The landlady didn’t appear to know much about it, and was in the process of giving the lady a vague reply when Takao, who had just finished filling out the check-in form, suddenly butted into their conversation.

“The Arakawa?”

The woman lived in a section of Tokyo called Setagaya, and was thus ill acquainted with the lower parts of town and didn’t know where the Arakawa flowed or how to get to it. She had never been before, but she wanted to take a look.

“The closest place to see it at would be...” Takao began to explain.

She would have to take the Tōei Asakusa line and get off at Asakusa Station to transfer to the local Tōbu line that makes stops at every station. She should then get off at Horikiri. After walking out of the station there it would be before her very eyes: a panoramic view of the vast Arakawa spread out before her.

“A panoramic view of the vast Arakawa. I’ll have a look.” The woman bowed, said a word of thanks, and took the elevator down.

“You sure are nice to the ladies. All high and mighty with your ‘panoramic view of the vast Arakawa’,” Noriko teased Takao from the couch where she was reading the paper. “What’s the river like? I’d like to see it too.”

“It’s a river beyond the Sumida River. Here you are, born and raised here in Tokyo and still don’t know about the Arakawa, huh?”

“No, I don’t. Let’s go have a look at it today,” she replied.

In his thirties, when Takao had finished his tenure in Hakodate and returned to Tokyo, he was made coordinator for the local branch office in Ryōgoku. At the time, the Sumidagawa was rife with pollution and gave off a foul odor. The Arakawa lacked that stench, so Takao would frequently walk along its banks during lulls in his workload. Sometimes he would take the Kyōsei train to Arakawa Station (now Yahiro Station), and transfer to the Tōbu train that he had mentioned to the girl before. He would finally get off at Horikiri Station and take a stroll along the shore of the Arakawa River. The expansive and “panoramic view of the vast Arakawa” worked well to soothe his rattled nerves. To a man born and raised in the suburbs of Suginami, the riverscape had an uncommon freshness to it.

“Hm, not bad. This place could hold its own against most noodle shops. The prices are great, too.” Noriko was content as she ate her bowl of *soba* noodles with fried vegetables on top, standing amongst the businessmen dressed in suits surrounding her.

“A woman would certainly never come to a place like this alone. It makes me a little bit jealous of you boys.”

Takao, showing off his knowledge, began to rattle off the names of a few inexpensive tempura shops and conveyor-belt sushi bars in the area.

“Huh, so those are the places you usually went to.”

“They were all built with low overhead in mind.”

Born in 1944 and raised during the time that followed the war, it was still difficult for Takao to get used eating expensively in the current age of plenty. For work, he often went to old-style Japanese restaurants or other fancy eateries, but every time he did Takao got the feeling that his childhood self was watching his adult self drink fine wines and eat expensive blowfish. It made him feel uneasy. As a result, Takao would usually choose a cheap cafeteria or bar & grill whenever he ate out by himself.

At the word ‘bar’ he remembered---

“There’s a bar & grill that opens up right around now.”

“Eh? Where?” Noriko was surprised.

“Akabane. They’re open from nine in the morning. It’s a nice place, do you wanna go?”

“Let’s go, let’s go,” Noriko responded promptly. She often drank beer or wine at home. “‘Cause one of the great things about being on vacation is that you can drink at noon and still not feel guilty.”

The two left the noodle shop and went to pay their respects at Suitengu Shrine before getting on the Hibiya subway line. They went to Ueno from Ningyō-chō-chō, and at Ueno the two switched to the Keihin Tohoku line and headed for Akabane.

“There’re a lot of factories in this part of Tokyo. So they probably found a need for a bar to be open early in the morning for the workers just coming off the night shift,” Takao explained to Noriko in the train. Back in the days when he worked in Ryōgoku, on mornings when he finished the night shift he’d speed off in a taxi with his coworkers to the very same bar.

Takao and Noriko left Akabane station through the North exit. There was a central plaza, with several lively avenues of shops stretching in different directions. Walking down one of them in the direction of Kawaguchi for two or three minutes brought them to the restaurant.

It was a little before noon, but the place was already packed. The restaurant's two u-shaped bars were 80% full. There were two open seats off in one corner.

"What an amazing place. There're so many things that I want to try. They've even got eel and carp." There was only one other woman at the bar, so Noriko suppressed her excitement and kept her voice low. The names and prices of the dishes on the menu were written on strips of paper that lined the wall. Noriko was fascinated by the choices.

"They're like little wishes written on slips of paper and hung on the wall at the Tanabata festival, and all so cheap."

Takao ordered hot *sake*, eel liver, and ice-washed carp for starters. After mulling over it for a bit, Noriko finally decided on a vinegared fish salad and sliced octopus. Behind the bar a middle-aged woman worked briskly. The *sake* was in front of Takao in no time, and the side dishes came not a moment later.

"That was fast."

"That's another thing that's good about this sorta place."

The two of them filled each other's glass. Little by little the warm sake began to circulate and warm them up. After finishing her salad, Noriko reached for the eel liver and carp.

"This means that all this time you've been eating at great places like this by yourself? I feel like I've missed out."

"Missed out?"

"All I'm saying is I never realized that places like this existed."

"That's probably 'cause women rarely come to places like this."

Noriko said 'missed out' once more, and then polished off the eel liver that Takao had ordered.

Takao had taken Noriko as his wife through an arranged marriage. A well-meaning aunt had introduced her to him once when he was back in Tokyo for the New Year holiday. He was working in Hakodate at the time. She had graduated from a women's college, but opted to stay at home instead of heading out into the working world. Noriko was a seemingly docile young lady who liked embroidery and knitting. But, after they went to see a movie together in the Ginza, she readily accepted his invitation to a local beer hall and drank two big mugs of beer. She laughed and explained that she often acted as her father's drinking buddy at dinner, and that that was how she learned to drink. Apparently, on the many nights when Takao would come home late from work or be on the job in some far away city, Noriko would often enjoy drinking with her son and daughter now that they had come of age.

"Enjoying a drink with my kids was always one of my dreams," she said, using words normally reserved for a father.

"Hmm, I wonder what kind of people start drinking at this time on a weekday," Noriko said again in a hushed voice.

"Gets me."

Even Takao didn't know. Factory workers just off the night shift, taxi drivers, local retired persons. A decade ago they might have been people just getting off the overnight train arriving in Tokyo from Northern Honshû. In this kinda place, people don't usually speak with the person seated next to them. They all quietly enjoy their alcohol alone. Despite the throng of people, privacy was preserved. Like a hidden village, there was a pleasant feeling of comfort to the place.

"So that's it, huh? It's a nice place, though. Gee, I missed out," Noriko said again.

This time she ordered a "Hoppy", a drink she had never tried before, and a potato salad.

"It's one of their specials, the Hoppy and potato salad. It figures that my alcohol-loving wife would naturally gravitate towards that."

Noriko took a sip of her Hoppy and sighed happily, "It's a little bit bitter, but good." She looked younger than usual with her cheeks rosy from the alcohol.

"Yôichi sent me another bottle of *sake*. Our son must think his mom is a tippler.□"

Their son Yôichi often sent bottles of famous brands of *sake* from Nîgata, where he worked at a regional branch of a construction company. They were always specifically addressed to Noriko, not Takao. It appeared as though he wanted his mom to give them a try. Their daughter Yukiko worked for a cosmetics company in Tokyo and lived alone in a small apartment in Naka-Meguro. She

came home every now and then, and was never without a bottle of wine “for mom”. The three of them had somehow bonded through alcohol. Takao was merely along for the ride at the dinner table. But, to the woman who had raised his children, those were the times when he quietly felt the most grateful. Work. Long business trips. Regional postings. He had always been like a vagabond in his own home, and before he knew it, his children were all grown up. These thoughts, to him, were inescapable.

“Wow, that was cheap! How much do you think we paid? 2,700 *yen*. What a restaurant.”

Noriko continued to be impressed by how remarkable the price was as they walked out of the store. Only at times like this she resembled a typical wife.

“If we had eaten at that morning market in Hakodate, it definitely would have been more.”

“There’s not much you can do about that. After all, Hakodate is for tourists.”

“Hah, for me this is a sightseeing trip in Akabane! But you’re right about a woman not being able to come here alone. Maybe I’ll bring my friends next time.”

“Don’t even think about it. Places like this are like a secret fort for middle-aged men.”

Noriko had to agree.

“Where are we off to now? Let’s go some place else, a *soba* shop or something. There must be some other places that you’ve been keeping secret from me, aren’t there?”

“No, I’ll be fine till this evening. More than that...”

He wanted to take a walk to the Arakawa River. It had been years since he’d seen its broad current and wide embankments. When he told Noriko that it was only a 15-minute walk away, she wanted to go too.

“*Soba* standing up, a Hoppy, and the Arakawa. I’m getting to enjoy these three things for the first time in my life. It’s all thanks to our flight being cancelled.”

Even with Hakodate whited-out, Tokyo was all blue skies. A blue sky in winter always seems clearer and crisper than in summer. The chill in the air felt pleasant.

“There’s a cat.”

After crossing a busy street with a lot of heavy traffic and then walking into a residential area, there was a large temple that had four or five cats living on its grounds. They appeared homeless at first, but interestingly enough, they found that a cat lover from the neighborhood had set up several little cardboard houses off in a corner of the temple grounds. They were comfortable around humans. One of them purred when Noriko rubbed its chin.

“It was tough when ‘Kuro’ died. Yôichi and Yukiko were really sad.”

When Yôichi was in elementary school, he brought home an abandoned cat that quickly became attached to him. They slept in the same bed together even after Yôichi started going to High School. Kuro lived for 13 years and died when Yôichi was in college. It happened in Yôichi’s arms.

“Even though he was a college student, he still cried uncontrollably. That got Yukiko crying, too. At the time, I remember thinking how glad I was they had become the kind of kids that could cry over something like that.”

When Noriko suggested that they get another cat, Yôichi vehemently protested. That would be too cruel to Kuro.

After leaving the temple and walking for another five minutes through the neighborhood, suddenly the horizon spread out before them, and they saw the long, grassy bank along the river. They crossed over a smaller stream called the Shingashi River and then stepped onto the earthwork. The Arakawa stretched out before them.

“Wow. I didn’t think the river was going to be this big. You were right when you said “panoramic view”. On a weekday afternoon like this, there was no one else on the bank except an elderly person walking his dog. That made the panoramic view seem all the more panoramic. They stood at the rocky point where the Arakawa diverged into the Sumida River and a floodway, the continuation of the Arakawa. On their right they could see the sluice gate used to control the volume of water let into each river.

“Hey! There’s an island over there!” Noriko pointed in surprise.

To be sure, there was a small island just before one reached the floodgate. A bridge extended from the embankment.

“I didn’t realize there was an island in the middle of the Arakawa.”

“Let’s check it out.”

Long ago, the floodgates had been a little further upstream. What had once been the gate was now the island. When they crossed the bridge, they saw the island had become a small park. The two of them sat down on a bench together and took in their view of the river. It didn’t feel quite right for a river in Tokyo. There was a size to the river that wouldn’t have been out of place in Hokkaido. There were cattails growing on both banks, and despite being a man-made floodway, the river still had a natural feel to it.

“It’s such a waste that there’s no one else around at such a nice place,” Noriko said as she stared off in the direction of Kawaguchi on the other shore.

“It feels like this place will disappear if we turn our backs to leave,” she said, still staring at the scenery.

A few clouds started to appear in the sky, shading the opposite shore. After a while it started to rain on the far side of the river. The rain started to close in on them, but it stopped short over the river. It was raining on one side of the river, and the sun was shining on the other. The area around the little island was particularly bright. With sunlight falling all around them, the married couple sat and watched the river flow on and on.

The Story

Does life end at 60? In this story, a recently retired man rediscovers the beauty of his wife, and learns that life was simpler and more beautiful than he had imagined. The original Japanese is very simply written, and tells a simple story of two simple people. After I read it for the first time, the depth and simplicity really appealed to me. When I look ahead to my own old age, I hope that I can find the same sense of calm and simplicity in life that this story brings to me. However, beneath the story's seeming simplicity, there is a great deal of cultural depth that made the translation rather difficult for me at first. It was only through Professor Tyler's explanations and guidance that I was able to better understand its depth.

In the past, Japanese men have typically been forced to retire at age 60 after over 40 years of working day and night for the same soulless company. Thus, it's at 60 that they begin to realize that they've missed the half of their lives that really matters: their children growing up and their wives in the prime of their lusty youth. Takao is no different. While he does feel regret over the fact that he wasn't able to raise his children, and jealousy over the fact that they are so much closer to their mother, he does appreciate all the hard work that his wife put into raising them. In his retirement, he finally has time to reflect on her, truly *see* her again, and recall all the things that he finds most attractive about his wife.

Noriko, on the other hand, gets a chance to go on an adventure and explore a part of her husband's life that she never knew. She sees the bars, stays in the hotels, and walks down the paths that her husband used to. Her surprise over all the different things she sees is fairly emblematic of the incommunicative and segregated relationships that plague many Japanese married couples. There is a very powerful sense of duty felt by both partners, and this leads many couples to lead two separate lives. Noriko is, of course, outspokenly jealous of all the awesome things that Takao has 'hidden' from her over the years.

The jealousy that both Takao and Noriko feel about each other's lives is a wake up call to Japanese couples who have been neglecting each other. Recently, a cultural phenomenon known as 熟年離婚 (*Jyukunen Rikon*) or 'Geriatric Divorce' is taking Japan by storm. Men, recently retired and living with their wives alone for the first time, find that they no longer have anything in common with the woman that they married 40 years ago. Women, who find that they have fought all those years for a man they no longer care about, simply don't want to put up with the trouble anymore.

Takao and Noriko overcome their newfound unfamiliarity and accept each other again. This story is about two people that re-learn the reasons why they fell in love in the first place. Takao fought at work. Noriko fought at home. Now that their battles are over, they can finally relax and enjoy the peace of each other's company again. They go on vacation, they talk, they learn about the mysterious person that they are still married to, and in the end they sit and enjoy the beauty of life together as it flows by.

The Translation

Like every story, there were unique complications to translating 'Cancelled Flight'. Specifically, I knew close to nothing about the geography or culture of Tokyo or the other cities that showed up in the story. Take the following example that shows how different readings of the same word can confuse the novice translator:

1. 朝市 = 'Asashi' = A restaurant named Asashi?? A place name??
2. 朝市 = 'Asa Ichi' = A famous morning market in Hakodate

The lay-person may not see it at first, but the *kanji* (Japanese characters) at the far left of the two examples above are the exact same. Their meanings are different, though! It would be similar to telling a Somalian fluent in English that you were going eat dinner at McDonald's. 'Who is McDonald? Why are we going to eat dinner at his house?' is what you might get back. #1 and #2 above threw me for a loop because I had no idea that there was a huge morning market in Hakodate that is famous throughout Japan for its fresh

fish. Of course, Professor Tyler has been there. I used example #1 in my translation, though, and got a big ‘X’ on my paper. Learning took place.

In another example that brazenly displayed my utter lack of cultural knowledge, Noriko decides to explore a side of her hometown that she has never seen before. She uses the following word when she tells Takao where she wants to go for a walk:

下町 = *Shita Machi* = Down Town (directly and literally translated)

However, the real meaning is a lot deeper, and has special applications to Tokyo in particular. In the olden days, Japan cities were usually built on hills, with the main castle built on the top of the hill and the rest of the city surrounding it. In Tokyo, and in this story in particular, this ‘downtown’ area refers specifically to the area that the elderly couple was within walking distance of: the Yoshiwara district. Yoshiwara is was once famous for its wild nightlife, full of mystique and rampant government-sanctioned prostitution. It is now a back-alley ‘soap land’. However, despite having grown up in Tokyo, Noriko has never been to this area, which can most likely be explained by her chaste upbringing. Her interest in seeing the area is not unjustified, and goes a little farther towards explaining the nature of her character: quite and modest, with a bit of a wild streak. It’s amazing to me how much a cultural understanding of such a simple word as ‘Down Town’ can deepen the meaning of a story.

It’s hard to forget about the difficulties I had translating the many food-related terms in this story. The first question that I had to ask myself was whether or not to transcribe the Japanese name into roman characters, or try to explain what the food is made of. For example:

Soba = Buckwheat Noodles

Sake = Rice Wine

Fugu = Blowfish (the one that can kill you)

Tempura = Batter-fried Prawns

All of these words are fairly well-known in America, but there are undoubtedly some who won’t understand their meaning. Therefore, a certain level of thought has to be given to the preservation of meaning versus the confusion of the reader, because there are also undoubtedly some people that would not understand quite what batter-fried prawns means, but would immediately understand *tempura*.

Another interesting example of the difficulty of translating food names, and by far the most memorable, comes in the form of a food that caused bile to rise in my throat the first time I understood what it was:

サケのハラミ = *Sake no Harami*

‘An unbroken placenta full of salmon eggs’ (the freshest ‘caviar’ you’re ever going to find, usually placed on top of a bowl of rice)

The decision here came down to whether or not I wanted to translate this disgusting food into what it was, or come up with an equally catchy name for the food. In my first translation I chose the latter and came up with ‘Expectant Salmon’, much to the amusement of all who read it. After further consideration, however, I realized that the point of translating anything is so that the reader of the target language can understand the text as well as any native person (and be equally disgusted or shocked or unmoved). This aspect of translation is part of what makes literary interaction with another culture so fun! I feel it’s best to convey every dirty detail rather than pull any punches. I hope you agree.

No translation is too crazy if it gets the meaning across.

Explore the possibilities of your own language.

If you can find the beauty in the original, you *can* put the beauty in your translation.

The spaceship carrying the members of the Alpha Centauri Research and Exploration Unit traveled a round trip of 40 trillion 290 billion kilometers, and safely returned to Earth with a gold mine of data. The captain and crew of six received an overwhelmingly warm welcome from radio, television, newspaper, and weekly magazine newshounds. It got so they didn't have a moment to themselves. Even Stohm, the ship's pilot-in-training, found himself under attack. The first time he got a chance to plop himself down on his plush couch and relax at home with his beautiful wife was a week after he returned to Earth. She was as breathtaking as ever, and nothing about her five-star treatment of him had changed a bit. Stohm was happy.

The nearly two weeks of special leave granted to all the members of the exploration unit faded in the blink of an eye, and it came time for Stohm and the others to return to their regular jobs in the lab. One day Mr. Cook, the ship's captain and head of the research team, came into the reference room where Stohm was taking notes and whispered, "Do you think you could come to my place tonight? I've got something important to talk about."

"Something important, sir?" Stohm replied.

"I can't talk now. It's top secret. It wouldn't be good for you to go blabbing to anyone else about it. Just come by tonight. The other members of the research team will be there too."

That night, the former members of the six-man crew all gathered in the captain's living room. It seemed as though nobody had been told what the meeting was about, and worry about the nature of the captain's forthcoming speech was clear in the worried faces everyone wore. After looking at each man's face in turn, at long last he slowly began to speak.

"I expect that what I have to say will shock you, but I have deemed it necessary to bring certain things to light. So, before I begin, I'd like to know something. Since returning to Earth, have any of you experienced something strange, or something you thought might be a little out of the ordinary? Has anything happened around you that's not quite what it used to be? What do you think? Stohm, have you noticed anything?" Everyone looked in Stohm's direction at once. Stohm was pensive for a moment, but then he looked up.

"Now that you mention it, there is one thing. There's this park in front of my house, and about a week ago all of the cherry blossoms flowered at once. I said to my wife, 'It's autumn but the cherry blossoms are in bloom. How strange.' She just gave me a funny look and said, 'It's springtime, honey. Everyone knows that the cherry trees bloom in spring...' I'm sure that we arrived home like we were supposed to, in the autumn. Right now it is most certainly October. But, nobody seems to find it odd that the park is full of cherry blossoms. It's obviously a freak occurrence that hasn't received the slightest bit of attention in the papers. Nobody's even talking about it."

"Now that you mention it, I've had something similar happen," Dr. Chichykov, the ship's doctor and biologist, said while getting to his feet. "The other day, when I happened to ask my wife whether or not she was prepared for winter, she said, 'It should be getting warmer from here on, so there's really no need.' A little annoyed, I replied, 'Don't be silly, the weather gets colder in

November, everybody knows that.' She just gave me a funny look and said, 'It starts getting *warmer* in November, and everybody knows that.' I just thought she must be trying to play some kind of joke on me, so I shut up after that, but..."

"That explains it!" Chin, the ship's astronomer, clapped his hands. "Last night I took a peek through my telescope for the first time in a while. Quite to my surprise, I found the constellations were in entirely different positions. They were the ones I'd normally see in the springtime!"

"It wasn't a misprint after all," said Callahan, the ship's record keeper. "The graphs for spring and autumn star positions were reversed. I checked some other books, and they were all the same. Not only that, they're the documents that we hold as authoritative sources in our own research center reference room."

"I see," the captain spoke again after nodding agreement to what each man had to say. "Well, gentlemen. This is the point where I give my big speech, but I think you've already begun to figure it out. To put it briefly, the Earth that we have returned to from Centaurus is not the same one we were living on before. It's someplace else."

Shocked, Stohm jumped out of his chair. "That's idiotic! Are you telling us that my wife really isn't my wife?!"

"Precisely, Stohm," the captain nodded with a sad look in his eyes. "Now listen to what I have to say. The other day I went to send a message to Satellite #22, and on the way there I observed a star from the ship's window. I was positioned just above the sun. I immediately surveyed it. The star was..." the captain finished slowly, "Earth."

Everyone quietly mulled this over in their own minds. There still seemed to be a lot of puzzlement on everyone's faces. Stohm asked the captain, "Alright, so what planet *are* we on?"

"This is also Earth," the captain said, getting up and moving to the table in the center of the room. He poured a few drops of wine on it and drew a figure. "What I'm trying to say is that this solar system has two Earths. Two Earths in the exact same orbit. There are two Earths, each having the same environment and developing in the same way, yet remaining undetectable to each other on account of being on exact opposite sides of the Sun. Of course, the odds of this sort of thing happening are one in a trillion, if not totally impossible. But, we have all come face to face with such a reality. The only difference between our Earth and this one is the position of the northern and southern hemispheres, which causes a half-year shift in the cycle of seasons. Other than that, these two planets are identical. We simply made a navigational error and returned to this Earth on the opposite side of the Sun.

For a while, nobody said anything. Finally, Chichykov spoke up, "What will we do?"

"Let's go home! We gotta go home!" Stohm shouted, jumping to his feet. Nobody objected.

That evening the six men quickly changed their clothes and quietly stole aboard their spaceship. The very next morning they were headed to the opposite side of the sun. It wasn't long before the research center caught wind of the crew's unscheduled flight and began sending an endless stream of radio orders.

"You're not allowed to depart without permission. Return immediately." The men sent back no response.

Just as they reached the halfway point of their voyage, the pilot discovered another ship coming from the other direction. It bore stark resemblance to the one Stohm and the others were riding on. To avoid collision, both ships did what they could to slow down and passed each other at a safe speed.

As they slowly glid past each other, Stohm was staring at the other ship from the window. Before he knew it, the captain was standing alongside him. Both men could see two people looking back at them from the window of the other ship... Stohm and the captain.

Just as the two spaceships overtook each other, inside both ships both Stohms bit their lips and bitterly jumped to their feet. "Son of a bitch! Those bastards! Our women..."

Both captains patted their Stohms on the back to comfort him, "The same goes for the all of us, Stohm."

It's just your usual, 'Scientists go to Alpha Centauri, come back to Earth, realize they landed on the Earth on the opposite side of the Sun from the Earth they originally came from, and go back to the Earth they came from after passing their mirror images from 'Earth 2''. Seriously, though, Tsutsui is really creative. All of his stories have this innovative twist at the end. Most of the things he write are sci-fi in nature, and the last paragraph is always a kicker. This story is no different. My favorite part is when the English gets really crazy after Stohm realizes his mirror image has been doing his wife back on Earth #1. "Son of a bitch! Those bastards. Our women..."

The Translation

This was the first story that I translated. I looked back at it after 4 months of intense translation training with Professor Tyler and realized how poorly I did on it. Even though Tsutsui's stories are remarkably simple for a man of his intellect, I still had a lot of issues with this story. The first and foremost problem I had was with embellishment. The simplicity of the original Japanese story caused me to be overconfident with myself and try to get more creative and extravagant with my English than I should have. For example, in the very first paragraph:

My first try: '...faded like a spark in the night.'

My second try: '...faded in the blink of an eye.'

Naturally, the original Japanese didn't mention anything about the word 'spark' or 'night', or even 'blink' or 'eye', but for some reason I decided to create a new metaphor in my zealous confidence on my first try. The second try is the result of dividing one humongous sentence up into two easily understood English sentences, a choice that I don't regret.

At first I was reluctant to divide up sentences and rearrange paragraph divisions, but overwhelming logic convinced me otherwise. Take the following sentences for example:

Original 'whack at it': The captain and 6-member crew, pilot-in-training Stohm included, received such an overwhelmingly warm welcome home from the radio, television, newspaper, and weekly magazine newshounds constantly hot on their heels that for a while they were unable to gain an inch for air.'

My second 'whack at it': The captain and crew of six received an overwhelmingly warm welcome from radio, television, newspaper, and weekly magazine newshounds. It got so they didn't have a moment to themselves. Even Stohm, the ship's pilot-in-training, found himself under attack.

I think that you'll find that the second try has all of the information that the first one did, and that those two periods add a great deal of simplicity to the whole works. The change in metaphors aside, they are quite similar. I'm actually very proud of the second try, but the first try is very near and dear to my heart. I spent a good 15 minutes working on it.

Translation takes time. And patience.

The Word document is your canvas, the source document, your margins.

The original is NEVER too crazy. Your translation might not be crazy enough.

Cow Town

by: Shin'ichi Hoshi

The worst part of a nightmare is that first second after you wake up from one. Or so a poet from way back when apparently said. In my case, and I'm sure it's the same with others, that feeling borders on becoming a migraine when the sun just starts to rise. It's an everyday thing with me, and it's all because this generation turned out the way it did.

I have dreams about food. Beautiful assortments of hors d'oeuvres, soup, fish and meat appear one after the other. They're in color, of course, and even have smell. Sometimes the warmth and feel of the food are even there. I'm telling you, these dreams are real. Even in the dream world, ice cream is cold and marshmallows are fluffy. I can't help but wonder if it's started to become a pathological illness. Illness or no, I don't particularly care. I just shove whatever's at hand into my mouth and start chewing. My teeth scrape together in vain and simply grind away. It's always that disgusting, sharp sound that my eyes open up to.

"Ahh geez, another dream..." I say to myself and rest my hands together on my stomach; my miserable, emaciated belly. I rub the area softly with scrawny hands in an attempt to distract myself from the hunger pangs, but my internal organs refuse to understand. My stomach produces a simple, yet pathetic noise that sounded like a bird's dull chirping.

My 4-year old's hungry cries echo out from the next room. My wife's attempts to soothe his cries have no effect, but instead put him into hysterics. This is an everyday occurrence, but that doesn't make it any better.

With all those noises, I slowly began to wake up, but I realized that something was weighing on my chest. I pulled my hand out from the covers and searched. Got it... a bucket of fried chicken. I grabbed a piece and put it in my mouth. You might call it a knee-jerk reaction. That tender, salty, subtle crunch. I couldn't stop at one. I stuck three in my mouth at once.

My fingers fumbled around looking for more, and finally grasped something soft. A sweet brandy-flavored cake. It melted in my mouth, danced upon my tongue, tenderly comforted my throat and slid down my esophagus playing a dreamy little tune before arriving in my stomach. The walls of my stomach raised a joyous cry and start squeezing. Kneading. It felt so good it hurt. There's food in my stomach. With that shock, I woke all the way up.

I ate it. I actually ate it. I've done something unthinkable. Regret sprinted circles in my head, my rationality roused and I jumped up. The array of food that lay on my comforter scattered to the ground. On my bed stand there was a container of thick milk and a fresh orange. I grabbed them and threw them one after the other into the garden through the half-opened window. I threw them out of spite. I started to get angry. I needed to get angrier. The anger distracts me from the hunger.

You can't get rid of hunger for good that easily, though. Even if you get rid of it for a moment, the hunger will find a weakness in your defenses and counterattack. Food that I hadn't thrown out still lay scattered about under the bed and in the corners of the room. The smell of pancakes and syrup, the fatty aroma of cooking meat... Oh, how I would love to slowly taste each and every one of them. How wonderful it would be. Daydreaming started me drooling, but the saliva slinks into my stomach. *No, I can't. I can't eat.* Because, with my reasoning veiled in the foggiest this morning while I was waking up, I already accidentally shoved food into my mouth.

If I hadn't done that, I could take my time choosing something good and eat it leisurely. Chewing over my regret, I mentally calculated the calories of what I had eaten. There's no room to eat anything else. *I can't.*

I stuffed some tobacco into my pipe, lit it and had a smoke. The nicotine infiltrated my empty stomach and I started to feel the urge to vomit. I know smoking isn't good for my body, but it helps ease the hunger pangs. Also, with the pipe in my mouth, I don't have the urge to put anything else in there. The pipe's mouthpiece has deep bite marks because I have a habit of idly crunching away at it.

My son's cries from the next room had gotten louder. Crying out with all his desires at once, it sounded like he had gone crazy, like a fire bursting into flame. I went over to him. He was holding on tightly to a clear bag of candy with his tiny hands. My wife probably couldn't handle him anymore.

"Hey, throw that candy away," I said.

"No! No!. Why do I have to? I wanna eat it. I wanna eat it..." I look at my child's sunken cheeks. Those tear-filled eyes look up at me with reproach. *I can't give in now.* I shouted.

"Don't talk back to me! You're not allowed to eat it because you're not allowed to. That's the reason. You got it? Now, hand it to me."

"No. Let me eat it..."

I wrenched the bag from my son's hands while he stared up at me with a look of desperation on his face. He bit my hand, and it hurt.

"If you won't understand words, let's try this."

I slapped his face again and again with the palm of my hand to make him remember. *Hurts, doesn't it? If you want to hate me, go ahead. In your hatred you may be able to forget your hunger for a while.* The crying reached a new high, but finally he collapsed in exhaustion. *I guess he's all tuckered out.* In the ruckus even I was able to forget my hunger for a bit.

"What should we do about him?" my wife asked.

"Let him sleep as he is, but don't take your eyes off him. He might try and sneak some food."

"I know, I've been keeping a close eye on him," she nodded.

I scanned the house from top to bottom. There was tableware thrown here and there. "Their" throwing technique had gotten a lot better lately. At times there have been haplessly placed ashtrays made of sugar, or chocolate phones on my desk. *I can't let down my guard.* I gathered all the stuff together and put it in a hole in the garden. Then I peed on it. But what good was that going to do? Those bastards will just re-stock and look for their next chance to throw something in my house.

My wife poured me some coffee. Sugarless. With a little sweetener mixed-in my nerves settled down a little. The smell of coffee is a good thing.

"I guess I'll be heading off to work now. Don't forget to keep an eye on the kid." I said to my wife.

"Okay."

I headed out the door and walked down the street. The busses were running, but I don't ride them. It's better to walk. It's good for the health. Lengthens the life.

It started to drizzle. It's not heavy enough to open my umbrella or find cover, just a pleasant dampness.

The rain turned the trees along the street greener, cleaned off the buildings, and livened everything up beautifully. It was refreshing. Everything around brimmed with health. A faintly pleasant smell hung in the air. It's the stuff in the rain, a mixture of ozone and chlorophyll and other stuff. "They're" doing it, of course. "They" control the weather so that it's early summer all year long. It rains like this every day, on schedule. A disinfecting rain...

I wonder how long it's been since "they" came to Earth. I've tried to remember, but the answer never comes. It wasn't enough of a disturbance to cause anyone to start counting the days, but every day since has been a constant battle with desire. Every day is the same, over and over. Inside the incessant pain and monotony, the months and years flow by in the blink of an eye.

They came from the planet Zebia. They brought their advanced civilization and technology with them, and for a while everything was cordial. The Zebians weren't very attractive to look at, but while we hesitated over whether or not to judge them by their appearance, we slipped into their clutches. Their strength lay in the fact that they were good at absolutely everything. We humans, on the other hand, were stubbornly divided on every issue. Resistance was futile, but we didn't even know how to resist.

The Zebians took charge of the Earth and changed it any way they pleased. Then, satisfied that the day-to-day operations were under control, they left a few of their people behind and pulled out. That's where we are now: overflowing with food, constantly beautiful weather, disinfecting rain...

If you walk by the Zebian Occupation branch office in any city, you can see them. It's impossible to learn to like them, no matter how many times you see them, especially now that I know what they're up to. They have hoofs, a cow's tail, a horse-like face, and ears like a rabbit's. On top of that, there's something pig-like about them, something avaricious...

When they're not in front of me, I get feel unpleasant just imagining them. It fills me with distaste. However, whenever I chase their image from my head, in its place I remember how hungry I am. Fumbling with this anomaly, I walked down the street to work. Somebody called out to me from behind.

"Hey, good morning!"

It was an acquaintance of mine. A man roughly 40 years old. He lived near my house and runs his own little art gallery. He looked healthy, energetic, and fat. He was chewing gum. I grimaced and said a few words.

"You should take better care of yourself. You seem fat and happy. Don't you care about your own body? You'd better be careful."

"Yeah, I know, but I can't resist. I can't stop myself from reaching out for good food. But yes, I am being careful. That's why I'm chewing gum instead of eating what I want."

I walked with him a bit longer. There was food strategically placed every now and then on the sides of the street. A basket of fruit next to a mailbox. A box of sandwiches hanging from the trees on the side of the street. “Please, eat me,” they say.

The Zebian robots set out all the food. They’re strong, and don’t break easily. In the early days there was a movement to destroy the robots, but it was difficult, and even if you did manage to damage one, they would just replace it. After everyone understood that, they gave up. The robots are also the ones that throw food in houses. I tried to strike up a conversation.

“You know, when I look at those robots I’m reminded of an old Scottish legend. It tells of little gremlins that secretly make food for you in the middle of the night while you’re sleeping. I used to imagine how convenient that would have been...”

“Yeah...” he responded absentmindedly.

When I looked back at him, he had stopped in the street and was reaching out for a cake sitting on top of a fire hydrant. I frantically tried to stop him.

“Don’t! I understand the hunger, but look at where you are. Control yourself. Think...”

“No, leave me alone, please. I want it. This life of denial in a forest of delicacies is too much for me. All the denial... how can you call this life?”

“What are you talking about? Have a little respect for yourself. Don’t give in to them.”

I was able to hold him back for a bit, but it didn’t last for long. Next, he stopped in front of a flower bed. Amidst the flowers, there was a bottle of sweet *sake*. He pushed me away and drank it.

“Ahh, delicious. Why don’t you have some too? This is what living is all about. Wouldn’t you agree?”

He flashed a satisfied smile, started to walk off, and that was it. With his first step one of the stones in the sidewalk fell away, a hole opened up and it swallowed him. The stone returned to normal. It was like nothing had happened. Beneath the stone in front of it there had been a hidden scale that measured his weight. It verified that he was over the weight limit, and in a chain reaction the next stone opened up like a trap door and served its purpose.

I thought to try and remember the location of the stone, but gave up. This isn’t the only one. Traps like it are all over the place. There’s no way to remember them all, and sometimes the locations change. The safest and most secure way to survive is to keep your weight down. Someone I knew just disappeared because he neglected to do so. Feeling a little glum, I put my hands together in prayer. There’s nothing more I could do. Salvation is impossible. It’s not my fault, and I suppose you can’t say it’s his fault either. It’s just the way things are.

I arrived at the office, a small publishing company, where I work in the accounting department. I greeted my co-workers.

“Good morning. On the way to work this morning, the guy walking together with me got swallowed by the ground. Sucks, huh?”

“A fatty, eh?”

“Yep, those trap scales built into the ground to suck people in are accurate as hell. Irritatingly so.”

“There’s nothing you can do. I’m sure he knew what he was getting himself into,” my co-worker said simply, putting an end to the conversation.

The image was still in my mind, though, and without hearing the rest of what he said, I muttered, “I wonder if hurts when it happens...”

“It’s probably not that bad. With the high-tension current, all it takes is a second and you’re a goner. After that they carry you away on an underground conveyor, disinfect you, process you, freeze your body and send you to Zebia. Then it’s ‘Sorry to keep you waiting sir, here’s your fresh frozen meat.’ and you’re done.”

My colleague laughed nihilistically. He laughed at the stupidity of the dead man. At the same time he laughed at his own cowardly, scrawny body, clinging desperately to life.

“Are Earthlings really all that tasty?”

“Probably to ‘them’. That’s why they go to all the trouble. If the bait is that delicious, then our meat must be a lot better.”

“I wonder how much the Zebians will eat before they’re satisfied.”

“I dunno. They don’t tell us anything, so we have no idea what our total population is. However, population isn’t the problem, it’s appetite. Like a pig, ‘they’ never seem to have enough. Maybe they’ll never be satisfied.”

While we were talking a package arrived. There was no return address. When we opened it a meat pie came out. It was warm, and a delicious smell billowed up into our noses.

“Looks tasty. Maybe I’ll have a taste.”

“Don’t even think about it. You won’t be able to stop at one bite. At least wait until lunch.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” he agreed.

He’s lived this long for the very reason that he can refrain himself. We started chatting again and had a smoke. There wasn’t really all that much work for us to do. We live in a world where the food supply is totally secured. There’s no need to work. But if you don’t, then you’ve got too much time on your hands, and idle time breeds hunger.

Nonetheless, it’s equally impossible to concentrate on work. Take, for example, a situation where you outwit somebody and get promoted. Within your desire for success, control, and fame, you’ll find a reason to live. You can try to satisfy your hunger by concentrating on work. That’s another way to live. It’s not good to overdo it, though.

In the blink of an eye, you’ve been erased. To them, erasing you in the blink of an eye is easy. You get labeled a thought criminal. It makes sense. If they let that kind of stuff go untended, the number of people plotting revolt might increase and become a problem.

We have to quell that desire. We have to help each other out, warn people if their ambition is getting out of hand, cover for each other, and keep going one day at a time. It’s sad thing when your friends get sucked into the earth or erased.

At last, the moment we’d all been waiting for arrived: lunchtime. What shall we have? In the halls of the office all different kinds of food are lined up. Their robot cooks brought it all in. At the end of a long debate over this and that, I decided on a salad filled with carrots, and not because they’re my favorite. It’s best to stick with the foods you hate. If you try something too appetizing, before you know it, you’ll eat too much. However, the carrot salad wasn’t all that bad. To fatten us up, it seems like they didn’t skimp on the research. After a lengthy battle with rationality, I decided to eat a slice of bread. I only ate half, though, and spit up the rest.

It's best to be conservative like that, because you have no idea where or what you'll end up eating. For example, there have been instances of people putting a pencil in their mouth and liking the taste so much that they ate the whole thing. It was peppermint candy that "they" had cleverly made. Things like that start to add up, you get fat, and that's the end of you.

There's really no specific time to quit work for the day, but I stopped working around 4. The weather was refreshing. Near the office there is a workout facility that "they" built. I went there and played tennis. Exercise is good for keeping the weight down. After a good sweat, I went for a swim. I do my best to keep the water out of my mouth, because there's a taste to it that turns into calories if you drink it. It can make you wonder why you exercised in the first place.

After swimming for a while I stopped for the day. It's not good to over-exercise either. You have to do it in moderation. However, some of the young guys over-do it. Their muscles bulk up and they become strong-looking men. When that happens, of course, they're erased. They get taken away into slavery and used as manual labor in cultivating some other planet. It's easy enough to imagine, don't you agree? Of course, they might also have the strong guys battle it out for sport. Or, some people say that maybe "they" don't like the hard meat. Either way, it's the same.

I rested for a bit in a chair next to the pool with my eyes half-closed. With my eyes all the way shut, the hunger boiled up. With them all the way open...

A beautiful young woman in a swimming suit came up to me. Wriggling her body, she spoke to me in a seductive voice.

"Hey there, would you like to talk...?"

"Leave me alone. I'm tired."

"I'll give you some energy. Let's go to that building over there."

She had the kind of beauty that you just want to pounce on, and even *I* started to stand up. However, I still had my wits about me. She's a Zebian spy. They get you to make a deal, you sell them your soul and you become one of their agents. Or, you go floating off with her to go drinking and she gets you to drink something high in calories. It's a life-shortener. Or, if you share a bed with her... she might get pregnant. The child gets taken to another planet as soon as it's born, raised by "them" and fattened up. Thinking about that being your own child isn't a good feeling.

Supposing you have the cruelty to get over that, as soon as you start enjoying yourself, you get your just reward. In the blink of an eye you're erased from the midst of everyone and taken to another planet like a human breeding horse.

"How about some other time," I shook my head and she winked at me.

"That's no fun. Well, see you around..."

She was nonchalant about it. She knows how sexy it is that way. I wanted to chase her down, but somehow I talked myself out of it. I couldn't give in to such a trite temptation. Continually driving back the temptation is nice and all, but there are some who can't handle it and lose their minds. A young guy that seemed to fit that description walked a short distance away from me with faltering steps, screaming some strange song. I felt bad for him, and as I followed him with my eyes he disappeared. Swallowed by the ground. The bad apples have to be eliminated. To "them", it's obvious. But to us...

Sometimes I think it's weird that I've made it this far unscathed. Amongst all these traps, I have come this far without getting tricked. I don't know if one could consider this way of life safe or not, but it's been okay so far. I can't let down my guard from now on either.

With my thoughts on that, I forgot about the woman and my hunger for a while. Before I realized it, I had drunk half of a glass of something that had been placed next to me. I was startled. When I let my guard down, the hand of temptation never misses its chance to get in.

I walked back down the street through the forest of food and arrived at home.

"How's the kid?" I asked my wife.

"I kept my eye on him. He keeps crying about wanting to eat, but I told him to put up with it until after you got home."

He was in his cage, looking sad. In a small voice he spoke to me.

“Can I eat something...?”

“Alright, just a little. Before that, though, sing five hymns, then you can have food.”

He did so, and with fervor.

“Was that okay?”

“Good. Alright, go wash your hands.”

I have to stretch out the time, even if only by a little. *It's for your own good. I don't want you to get fat and die young. After you grow and learn about the forces that rule this world and how to eat using your own judgment and willpower, I don't care. Until then, though, it's my job as a parent.*

My boy finally got food. I chose something for him that looked low in calories, and after a bit he finished eating. He started singing more hymns. How innocent. I'm not going to lose to something like that, though. I can't relax my rules. I turn on the television and flip through the channels. They were running some classical music. I watched for a bit. It's better to not watch dramas. There are a lot of sexy scenes, scenes that excite the appetite, and stories that incite ambition. If not that, then scenes of full of murderous violence. If you get influenced by that and use violence in public as an outlet for your frustration, you're done for. You can bet “they'll” get rid of anything that tries to hurt their cows.

I went into my study and read. Before that, though, I threw all the scattered food in the area around me out the window. If that stuff is nearby I won't be able to concentrate on reading my book. I try to avoid anything that has appetite-stimulating material. Philosophy or advanced mathematics are usually good. The subjects aren't very interesting, but when you read them slowly and concentrate all your attention, some interesting stuff comes bubbling up from within the text somehow. You forget your hunger as well.

Today I chose a book on religion. It's good for calming the heart and sating the appetite. Even if it doesn't calm you down, it does offer a bit of comfort.

“Humans are piling sin upon sin. It's selfish. In their selfishness they're cruel to the cattle that they raise. They feed them food to fatten them up, get rid of the violent ones and the ones that are hard to deal with, gather together all the optimal cows, and raise them on a ranch. Well, they're getting their just reward now. It's repentance for sin. Once you realize this, you will be saved.”

Just then, from the pages of the book, a smell rose up. It was a trick, a book made out of edible paper. I should have checked it out better before picking it up. In a flurry, I throw it away. I am not a strong enough man to continue reading it calmly.

Man, this life sucks. It's thoroughly heartrending to think that mankind was meant to end up like this. I can't die because my instinct to live is too strong. Ironically, rationality and the will to live are too weak to suppress desire. To fight back against a single slice of cake, you have to mobilize all your willpower and lucidity.

What will happen to mankind now? What will happen to me? How long can I continue to live? No, I can't lose. *I will show you bastards I can live.* But how long will this continue? This state of affairs... how much longer...

“How much longer are we going to keep this up?” one Zebian said to his friend, inside a local Zebian Occupation branch office.

“Things have finally started to settle down. Don't you like your job?”

“But... these earthlings are unpleasant, avaricious...”

“Don't say that. It's because of their avarice that we have to do this. Even so, we're making progress, wouldn't you agree? We're philanthropists. If we'd left them as they were, they would have destroyed themselves at some point. If we hadn't taken these desperate measures for their sakes, they wouldn't be able to do anything for themselves. Eventually everyone's personalities will change, they'll learn to control their own desires, start to head towards a better future, realize what we did was good afterall, and

thank us from the bottom of their hearts. I don't think it will take that long. The spread of egotists, fatties, lechers and the 4 other types of deadly sinners has slowed down quite a bit..."

The Story

‘Cow Town’. It wasn’t my original title, but after reading the story all the way through twice, I chose it because I felt it more accurately reflected what the author wanted the story to say: ‘you are fat and weak’. My original ‘Farm Town’ was okay, but it just doesn’t have the fatty punch that the image of a city full of cows has. For a mental image, visit virtually any city in America. Anyone with a little Japanese training should be able to see that my translation is clever. Mr. Hoshi is again making social commentary, and so am I. ‘Ahh, Motherland!’ approaches the issue of media control and the defenselessness of the Japanese homeland. ‘Cow Town’ looks at the Japanese as human beings and seems to say, ‘You can no longer control your urges. Your animal instincts are greater than your willpower. You are no greater than any other animal because you are weak.’

It seems that the author again has issues with the government in this story as well. The Zebians have taken control of the Earth, and are under the impression that as ‘elected’ rulers of the planet they have a responsibility to their citizens to make the world better. They go about doing this in a way that seems logical to them. At one point the narrator says, ‘The bad apples have to be eliminated. To “them” it’s obvious, but for us... (it sucks)” You can feel free to substitute your favorite political figure or government organization for “them”. They’re all the same, anyways. They’re all Zebians trying to remake the world in their own perfect image. At least that’s what this story is trying to say.

At the same time, this story is obviously an attack on the changing food culture of Japan during the 1970s. The Japanese people were just coming into contact with McDonalds and other types of western foods. Their diet had previously consisted largely of fish and vegetables. Thus, their life spans were longer, and their people were skinnier and healthier. However, with the importation of the American way of life, taste subdued sense, and the need for a wake-up call like this story emerged. It went unheeded and the current status of Japan results. You can see outcome of this on any given street in Tokyo.

The Translation

I had to read this story all the way through once before I could translate it. Some of you may not think that this is significant, but it goes against my assumptions when I first started translating. I was under the impression that words are words, and that they can only be translated in two ways, the correct way and the incorrect way. This is not so. The explanation of how I chose my title is a good example.

With my previous experience translating Mr. Hoshi’s work, I was able to get into the translating ‘flow’ pretty quickly and bang out a couple of pages in an hour or so. That is such a fantastic feeling. Everything is going really smoothly, every sentence just flows out, and I rarely have to use my dictionary to look anything up. It’s like skiing on fresh powder snow, ice skating on a freshly Zambonied ice-rink, or eating Jello. This is a phenomenon that happens a lot, apparently. Once the general structure of an author’s writing style gets in your head, the reading and the understanding get a lot faster. It’s almost like a connection of souls that facilitates the communication of language.

However, when I was working with Professor Tyler afterwards, it seems like there were some subtleties that I had not taken into consideration. While reading through the beginning of original Japanese for the first time, there is a feeling that something isn’t right, but the reader isn’t quite sure what is wrong. It was easy to confuse this ambiguousness with an error in translation. Take the following example that comes from a rather important sentence towards the beginning of the story (the third English page of this story a little below the middle of the page):

‘Their throwing technique has gotten a lot better lately.’

After reading through the story for the second time, the meaning of this sentence is obvious: ‘The Zebian robots have gotten a lot better at throwing food into houses lately’. However, upon reading the English translation for the first time, it almost seemed as

though the mother and child have gotten better at their throwing technique. This is not quite so ambiguous in the original Japanese. The word used in Japanese gives a little bit of a stronger hint that it's not wife and child doing the throwing, but someone else. The word used in the original is a little bit closer to the word 'their', with quotes around it. The subtlety of the quotes adds a bit of mystery to the word that first tips the English reader off to the fact that everything is not hunky dory. However, this brings up an interesting thought: the translator has many tools as his or her disposal to re-create the meaning of the source document as accurately as possible.

In translation, no holds are barred.

Go with the flow.

All the 'tools' in the toolbox are there for a reason. Use them all whenever possible. Buy more any time you can.

Supernatural

By: Tsutsui Yasutaka

"I see. So you're saying that you absolutely refuse to believe what I'm telling you, right?" Mr. Kaneda said to his nephew Jirô with a forced look of anger in his eyes.

Jirô let a little smile rise to the surface of his effeminate face, and replied to Kaneda with something akin to disdain, "Well, uncle, it's really hard to believe the words that are coming out of your mouth. Just give me one shred of proof that you possess supernatural powers. I'll believe you if you can give me something worthwhile to go on."

"Okay, I can handle that, " Kaneda said, leaning forward onto his faded and rickety desk. "Let's see, what should I show you..."

"Exactly," Jirô mocked. He leaned back, and the weight of his body kept the exposed stuffing of the chair from peeking out. "Alright, why don't you try to guess what I'm thinking right now. How's that?"

"You're kidding me. Read your mind? That's a cinch. But, I'll give it a try anyways." Kaneda closed his eyes. He pursed his thick lips and just sat there for a while, concentrating. The room was quiet. Every now and then a gust of air would come into the small room through an opening in the poorly hung glass door. At long last, Kaneda raised his plump body, opened his eyes and said, "I've got it. You're all out of money to play with. You came here tonight to press me for more money, to borrow cash you have no intention of repaying." Jirô stared in the general direction of his uncle's sagging cheeks with a vacant look on his face. Then he suddenly burst out in laughter.

"Am I wrong? I'm right, aren't I?"

"You got it! But, wouldn't you agree that the only reason I ever come to you is to borrow money? After all, you're the only relative I've got. I'm sure that you

probably realized that much as soon as I got here. Of course your guess was right. If that's the best you've got, then even I can do that."

"Oh? What can you do?"

"I can read what you're feeling."

"What? You can read minds too? That's interesting, try it."

"Don't mind if I do. Uncle, you consider giving money to me to be the same as throwing it into the gutter and have no intention of giving any to me again."

"Bullseye!" Kaneda exclaimed, opening his large eyes. "So, you've got supernatural powers too! You know, I'd heard a while back that these powers were genetic, but to think..." Kaneda taken aback, and for a while he just sat there, cocking his head to the side in wonder.

Jirô fidgeted for a bit and finally said unhappily, "Sooo, you're not going to give me any money tonight, huh?"

"Of course not." Kaneda's expression suddenly turned sour. He looked around the run-down house and gestured with his chin, "Just look at this place. What's more, it's about to go to somebody else. I am a hair's breadth away from bankruptcy. You think I have any extra money for you? I keep telling you. You need to get control of yourself."

"Hmmm, maybe you're right," Jirô said, hiding the bored expression on his face. He was quiet for a moment, but then he looked up questioningly at Kaneda. "According to what I read inside your head, though, you think that you're some kind of rich fat cat, don't you?" Kaneda's face turned pale. "That's right. You live in this dilapidated old house to hide the fact that you're rich. But, you can't fool me. As of now, your estate is worth... let's see..." Jirô closed his eyes and looked up. "30,000,000 yen!"

Without thinking, Kaneda rose in his seat. "You're right again!" he yelled, but then sighed and settled back into his chair. "Hmmm, I see. It seems like I can't get anything past you. Still, I ain't giving you any money. That's right, it's my precious money and there's no way I'm giving it to the likes of you. If I'm going to lend out money that won't ever come back, I might as well play around and spend it all myself... Wait! How about I try my hand at what you were just thinking?! Deep down inside you just cursed my name and called me a miserly old scrooge. Am I wrong?"

"But didn't you just think of me as a good-for-nothin' whipper snapper?"

"You're right on the money there. You're a lazy, lascivious, gangster type, with a stingy greenhorn streak to boot. Oh? Right now you're thinking that at this rate, you'll have to give up for now and wait for me to die before you can inherit it, aren't you?"

"Oh? So that's what you think, huh? You have no intention of giving me your money. Oh, now I see. You intend to give all the 30 million to an old folks home so that your name will be remembered?"

"You betcha! Hahaha! It's useless for you to weasel after my inheritance."

"Ahhh, you're going to start working on your will as soon I leave tonight, are you? What's the rush?"

"What are you talking about? Strike while the iron is hot, or so they say."

Suddenly, Kaneda's complexion changed. Blood boiled in his eyes. "Y-y-you're thinking about killing me, aren't you? B-b-before I can write my will... like right now, right this minute... m-murder me...."

Jirô turned pale. "You found me out. Now I've got no choice. Yeah, you're right. Ah!you, even you thought of killing me just now, didn't you? If it means that you'll be killed, you'd rather get the jump on me instead and... k-k-kill me?"

"Whoa, you're thinking of using that vase next to you to split my head open! I won't let you!"

"Ah! You've got a gun in your desk drawer, don't you? An old model Remington. Right?"

"You bet I do. I'm a step ahead of you. It'll take you two meters to reach that vase. All I have to do is open this drawer, take out the gun and pull the trigger."

"Heh heh, but what you don't remember is whether or not you put a round in the chamber. The reason you're sweating is because you're doing all you can to remember. You just try it! If there's no bullet, you're gonna be in a world of pain. Huh? Hey now..."

"Hmph. Go ahead. Try something funny. You'll find yourself with a hole in your forehead. I'm a steady shot. C'mon! Make your move!"

The two of them stared menacingly at each other. Neither man stood up. Neither dared to move an inch. Only the wheezing sound in their throats remained. On the table, the clock's second hand continued to tick away, resonating loudly.

"Damn! This has gotten really serious!"

All of a sudden, Kaneda jumped frantically up from the couch in which he had been dozing. He called Jirô's place. Jirô answered the phone and Kaneda nearly shouted, "Ah, Jirô! It's me, your uncle. Hey, you said that you were coming to my place tonight, right? Yeah, you should give up on that idea."

"What? Why?"

"I just saw the future with my supernatural powers. It seems like some terrible, unavoidable thing will happen."

"What the heck? Hahaha. Your super powers are acting up again, huh? That's idiotic. You don't actually believe in your prophecies, do you? Actually, I do have something more important to talk about than usual tonight. I'm heading over there right now, so..."

"Ah, wait... Jirô!" The phone line went dead. Kaneda began to get worried. "Ohhh, this isn't good. He'll be here any minute." He quickly picked up the vase next to the couch and sent it crashing to the ground. He then went to the desk drawer to check the chamber of the Remington to make sure there were still two rounds left. "Alright, this should be enough..." he said with relief and sat down. "There's no way some punk like that's gonna get my inheritance. It's my 30 million..."

Mr. Kaneda took three pieces of paper from his pocket and smirked at the tickets that were sure to bring him luck on next week's super mega lotto.

The Story

It's just your usual, 'Grandfather and grandson can read each other's minds, end up realizing each other's intentions, and nearly finish each other off before the reader realizes it was all a dream, but that it wasn't really a dream, just a prediction of a crazy future that will come to pass.' Tsutsui does it again. I doubt that there is much social commentary or philosophical depth to this story, but maybe it exists. From what I've read of this author's works so far, it all seems like summer blockbuster fare, mind-candy to amuse the imagination with short 'what-if?' situations. These stories were all very attractive when I started translating because they were little bite-sized pieces of Japanese in which I could find a bit of 'literary closure' rather than tackling a large story all at once. One of the most frustrating parts of translating is how long it takes, so when you're first starting out as a translator simple things like Tsutsui's short stories are a very welcome exercise.

The Translation

Have you ever written a story where the characters can read each other's minds? Neither had I, so the logistics of representing the dialogue were a little confusing at first. The Japanese is equally curious for the same reasons, but it also uses a lot of hesitation noises and gasps and such, which make it quite easy for the reader to follow along while reading the original. Take the following phonetically written Japanese phrases together with the translations I made, and try to come up with your own guess as to what English sound they might translate into:

へえん = 'Heyyyn' = 'hmmmm'
ふうむ = 'Fuumu' = 'hmmmm'
ふふん = 'Fufun' = 'Heh heh'
ひゃあっ! = 'Hyaat' = 'Damn!'
おい = 'Oy' = 'Hey now...'
ええ = 'ehh' = 'Huh?'
さあ = 'saa' = 'Ohhh...'

You get the idea. Sounds are difficult to translate. Certain sounds in Japanese imply that the speaker is thinking. Other sounds imply that they're surprised or confused. Finding an equivalent in English sometimes means venturing outside the realm of actual words that exist in the dictionary, and creating 'sound fabrications' that mimic as closely as possible the noise an English speaker would likely make under the circumstances in the scene being translated. Not altogether an easy task, but an interesting one. I hope you did well on the test above.

1,000 Nights

by: Tomoyo Kawasumi

I have known her since we were kids.

She used to have blonde hair, but it slowly turned brown as she got older, and the darker it got, the more beautiful she became.

One Fall, when her brown color was at its deepest, I plucked up the courage to ask her to a dance.

“How about a cup of coffee?” she asked.

“No, I’m fine. Thanks.” I answered.

This was the third autumn since she had become mine. The 1,000th night we spent together was a chilly one. I always loved coffee she would pour for me on such cold nights.

But tonight is not the same as all those other nights. I have to tell her--tonight.

“I have something to tell you.” I said.

“Hmm?” she asked.

“I...”

I said the words that I had practiced in my mind so many times.

“...can’t stay.”

“I know.” She set her coffee mug down silently.

She seemed to sigh a little, but did not get mad or begin to cry. That hurt a little.

“The nights we spent together made me so happy.” She smiled.

I almost said, ‘Did you know? This is our 1,000th night together’, but somehow swallowed the words. If they spilled from my mouth, she would say ‘Sweetie, you’ve been keeping count? Silly.’ with a sweet little giggle, and that smile would make it harder to say goodbye.

“Good night. I love you.” I pronounced those words of love for the 1000th time, but in a different way from the previous 999 nights.

“Good night. I loved you.” She whispered those words of love for the 1,000th time, but for the first time with a sense of finality.

I closed her door for the last time.

It was late at night, and cold. It would be nice to have some snow if it’s going to be so cold, I thought. There were still a few of other people waiting for the train on the subway platform. It was a little funny to think that they would all eventually arrive at different destinations, despite heading to the same direction.

I remember the evenings that I spent with her. After all those 999 nights we spent together in the same bed, watching the same dream, now my new first morning will dawn with the closing of a night just like all the rest. They had all seemed to be the same, but I realized they were not. On which night did our paths begin to separate? Maybe we were walking different ways that seemed to be the same.

These thoughts made me a little sad, but I got into the train. Everything will be all right. A new day is dawning.

1,000 Mornings

I have known him since we were kids.

He wasn't the smartest guy, but in him there lay a hidden tenderness and strength that other women could not see. It made me happy to keep this secret to myself.

He invited me to a dance, his face blushing, and if you were to open my heart on that autumn day, an odd feeling of mixed surprise, happiness and confusion certainly would have popped out.

"How about a cup of coffee?" I asked.

"Sure. I'll have some." He answered.

I was alone on the 1,000th night we were supposed to be together.

I already knew that we couldn't walk down the same path together any more. I was too good at picking up on the clues.

I regretted it. I loved him too much, and I let him go.

By the time I realized what was happening, it was already too late. We were walking different paths when I looked back.

It was raining outside.

The third spring without him was coming to a close.

My 1,000th lonely morning will soon arrive, but I still haven't seen him since that night.

I scurried to the bus stop to avoid getting wet.

A bus can take me where I need to go, but it never gets to where I really want to go.

I sat in a window seat and watched the crowd coming and going in the downtown rain.

I am too good at picking up on the clues. I'm never wrong.

I hastily got off the bus.

1,000 words of love. 1,000 regrets. Everything melted into the pouring rain.

I ran through down the small path that I had found at last.

"Good night. I love you." Today he whispered those words of love again.

"Good night. I love you, too." Today I answered again with the same words of love.

I thought about him sleeping next to me.

I also thought about myself.

I thought about us together, and closed my eyes.

A new day will have dawned when I open them the next time.

But I will not be alone anymore.

The Story

I was lucky enough to meet this up-and-coming young author through a friend of mine. In its elegant simplicity, her style obviously takes influences from the likes of Haruki Murakami. However, the stories leave a lot unsaid and lack his straightforwardness. Rather than this being a weakness, though, she uses the random details and thoughts of everyday life to bring a stark realism to two short and simple stories.

The silent understanding between the two lovers in this story remind me of many things that I have read about Japanese relationships. Where Americans seem to rely on words, Ms. Kawasumi makes it clear that this couple knew each other well enough emotionally to know when to call it quits. In a subtle twist in the second story, however, it seems to me that the two have gotten back together. After conferring with the author myself, there are enough subtle clues in the story to come to that conclusion. Happily, my translation also seems to come to the same conclusion.

The Translation

This is the first time that I have ever conferred with an author after finishing my translation. The experience added a lot of depth and confidence to my understanding of Japanese translation. I'll admit, though, I didn't fully understand the whole story after I read it for the first time. Even after I translated it for the first time there were a few things that weren't right. Fortunately, the stories were short enough to allow me to re-read them a few times and gather together all the clues. I measure my success in the reaction that the author had to my work. She liked it. It makes me wonder whether or not I'm truly understanding everything else I work on.

I found that I often had to restrain myself in translating Ms. Kawasumi's style. Her sentences are so short and straightforward that any ornamentation or unnecessary wordage would have ruined the impact of such simple prose. The difficulty in this, of course, is making equally simple yet meaningful, English sentences.

If you think it's too simple, it's probably because you're thinking too hard.

Don't mess around with perfection.

K.I.S.S... (Keep It Simple, Stupid)

『やさしい夜

きみといた 短い1日
きみに会えない夜はどうしてこんなにゆっくり明けていくのだろう

眠れない夜 星を数える
星の数だけ きみを想う

夜空にきみを描く
何度も何度も記憶のきみの線をなぞる

やさしい風
やさしい月

きみに会えない やさしい夜』

筆者：トミーのやさしい心
訳者：トミーのやさしさを解説しようとする外人

「” Benevolent Eve”

A single day, spent together.
Why does night fade to day so slowly,
When I cannot be with you...

Sleepless nights, I count the stars.
As limitless as they are,
I always think of you.

I draw your outline in the night sky.
Over and over I trace the lines of your memory

Oh, tranquil wind.
Oh, placid moon.

The nights treat me well,
When I cannot be with you.」

Author: Tomoyo
Translation: Daniel